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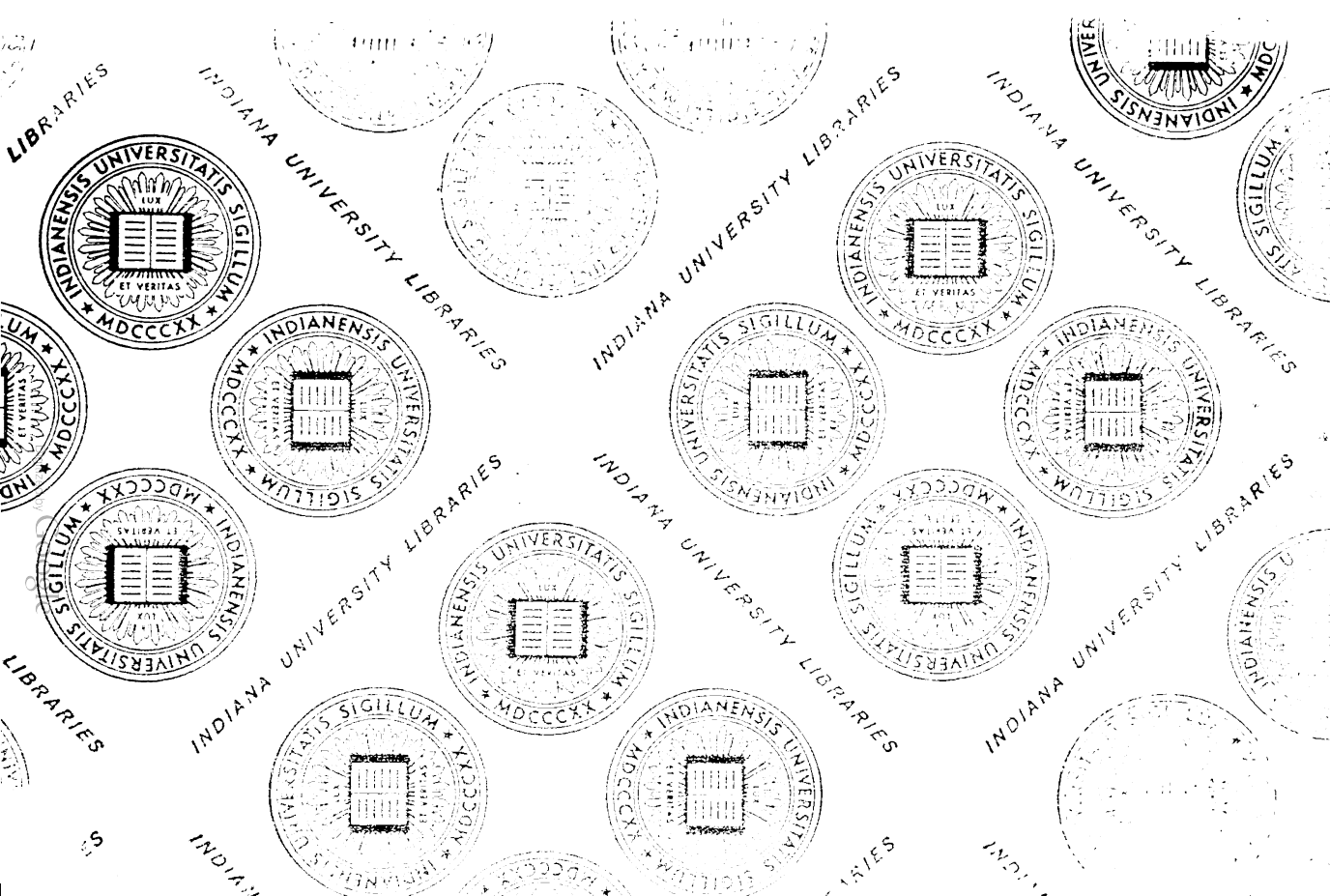
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THE EXCURSION TO TILSIT

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THE EXCURSION TO TILSIT

BY

Hermann Sudermann

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

Lewis Galantiere

New York

HORACE LIVERIGHT · 1930

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THE EXCURSION TO TILSIT

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THE EXCURSION TO TILSIT

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THE EXCURSION TO TILSIT

WILWISCHKEN lies on the bay; right on the bay lies Wilwischken. And if you turn from the broad waters into the river Parva you find yourself gliding so close to the houses that you feel you must throw a couple of onions—or perhaps carrots—into the windows from the boat. It would be a great pity to break those smooth polished windows, for Wilwischken is a clean village and a prosperous village. Besides their river and harbor fishing, its inhabitants earn a good living out of farming and market gardening. The onions of Wilwischken are renowned.

Of all these farms the most magnificent is the one which fills the sharp bend in the estuary of the Parva. It belongs to Ansas Balczus. Ansas is not one of those ordinary fishermen who bury their share of every haul in the sand and grumble about their catch, or those who offer their perch in Heydekrug under the market price on Mondays and go home drunk on Tuesdays. Ansas is almost some one you say "sir" to—a man who speaks German to the Germans like a German, sips his glass of grog like a German, and is so cunning in his lawsuits that he never has to pay a lawyer's fees.

This Ansas Balczus took unto himself a splendid wife. She came from Minga and was the daughter of Jaksztat, the rich owner of the wide meadows

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along the bay. No one would ever have believed that Ansas could win Indra Jaksztat for they were all scrambling after her; but she passed them by, as gentle and pale as a daughter of the sun, and he got her. And she was some one to be proud of. She bore him three beautiful children, and watched over their farmstead as one in league with the auspicious goddess Laima. The tradesmen fought for her butter while it was still in the churn; her red-currant wine was the headiest near and far; and in the bridal corner of her house she had had two easy chairs of red plush since the previous Christmas. People even said that she meant to buy a piano for Elska when the little child was seven. Just the same she went her way as pale and gentle as when she had been a young girl, and she still blushed as pink as a flower when she was spoken to.

Now you know the kind of person Indra Balczus was. If I had been Ansas I should have raised up my hands in thanks to Heaven every morning and every night for having given me her, and not some one else, as my wife. And so indeed Ansas used to do. But after Busza came into the house as servant everything changed. Changed so that the neighbors' wives had long been in the habit of putting their heads together whenever the sound of abuse and weeping rose up from the Balczus's yard. The abuse came from Ansas. Everybody knew his voice. But Indra did not weep—or if she did it was very softly and very late at night. It was the three children who

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cried for the shame their mother had to endure. And sometimes laughter was mingled with the sound—laughter that was not good to hear but hard as glass and malicious as a jay's harsh cry.

The devil himself had brought this Busza into the house. If she had not been a landowner's daughter and therefore proud and arrogant by nature she would not have been able to do so much harm. Why did she have to go into service with her glittering eyes and her apple-blossom flesh? Who knows how many heads she has already turned? She took men on and then let them go, and when she had driven a man insane she would laugh and go to work in another house.

Here she was now in Balczus's house, the incarnate antithesis of his silent and sweet-spirited wife. She sang and flung things about and roared from break of day until late into the night, doing work enough for three and flaring up if any one suggested that she might take things easier. But after Ansas first stopped in her room her joking ended. It was pitiful to see her gradually assume entire command of the household. He was weak, and he did everything she ordered. Such things do happen occasionally where the wife is a sloven or an invalid who lets things drift as they will. But Indra, rich Jaksztat's beautiful daughter, who was if anything too fine and too highly bred! No one knew what to think of a world in which this could happen.

One day when Ansas had got drunk again and had

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struck her, a neighbor, Anna Doczys, came to her and said, "Indra, your neighbors cannot bear this any longer. We have made up our minds. I am going to write to your father."

Indra grew paler than ever and said, "Don't do that. If you do, father will take me home with him. And what will become of the children?"

"I shall do it just the same," Anna said. "Such an outrage cannot go on in the world."

Then Indra begged for her husband, saying, "If people hear much about this it will be very bad for him. He cannot arrange to marry her, because he is an adulterer. I should have to bring suit against him, and they would not let me have the children. And now he gets drunk more and more often. We all have to think of the future."

"But are things to go on like this?"

"She has already run away from five places when she has had enough of them," Indra went on. "And it won't be any different with him."

But Anna Doczys, the good soul, warned her again and again,—for after all she was a neighbor to whom the same thing might happen to-morrow. "We have found out," she said, "that until now her lovers have all been drunken loafers and crazy louts. She won't let a man like your husband go." When she heard this, Indra remembered with sadness what a splendid husband she had had before Busza came into their home. But she did not complain. That was not her

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way. She turned her sorrowing face a little aside and said, "God's will be done."

But before that, the will of Anna Doczys was to be done.

Anna went home and said to her husband, who was sleeping on their north-country stove, "Doczys, here are your rubber boots. Put up sail. We are going to Minga."

"Why should we go to Minga?" he asked indignantly. For he who sleeps loves his rest. But Anna, still thinking that to-morrow might bring her turn, paid no heed. She pulled him off his bed, tugged on his heavy boots, and a half hour later they were on their way to Minga.

The next day old Jaksztat arrived in Wilwischken. He did not come by boat: that was a poor man's way of traveling and would not do for him. He preferred the longer and more difficult way overland, so that with his closed carriage and silver harness he might the better impress his son-in-law with the kind of family his wife had been born into.

We all remember old Jaksztat. The bowlegged little man with the rugged bony face and the eternal razor cuts was familiar enough. As a matter of fact when he died he turned out not to be so very rich after all. But that has nothing to do with this story.

Busza whose eyes were everywhere was the first to see the carriage coming. She went out of doors at once. What did he want, she asked, staring at him,

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her hands on her hips. Jaksztat wasted no time. He took the whip from his coachman's hand and lashed her just once. The whipstroke left a flaming mark across her face and bare right arm. And what did the girl do? She seized the old man, dragged him down from his carriage, and began to beat him with her fists. The coachman jumped down from his box and Ansas came running from the house in dismay, and it took both men to tear Jaksztat from the grip of the enraged woman. God knows, she might otherwise have killed him.

How deplorable this incident was in itself developed in the scene which followed with the old man from across the bay. Ansas' misbehavior had not yet led him so far astray that he failed to realize what disgrace such an occurrence must bring far and near upon his house. Drawn up to his full height he stood silent before the old man, his face fresh and tanned and his yellow flaxen hair brushed back behind his ears. But his eyes found no place to rest. Jaksztat was snorting with anger,—and also because his breath still came short after the recent shaking-up.

"Where is your wife?" he demanded.

How should Ansas know where his wife was? In her helpless way she often wandered out of the house, over there in the distance where she was more secure from reproaches and blows.

"I am Jaksztat, the rich man!" the old fellow railed. "Am I expected to submit to such abuse?"

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Ansas begged off as well as he was able; but there was not much he could say.

"This beast, this wild woman must leave your house at once!"

"There, there," Ansas mumbled. Except for this unfortunate encounter between Busza and the old man Ansas would undoubtedly have thrown out his chest and shouted that this was his house, that he was master here. But in the circumstances he could only mumble "there, there." The old man was quick to see that this was his chance, and he let loose a volley of speech. There are not many terms of abuse in the Lithuanian language which Ansas did not hear hurled against himself and his mistress. In the end the old man became quite weak. He went indoors and sat down beside the stove and wept.

Indra came home. She had gone to fetch the two eldest children from school. Slender and straight as the Blessed Virgin Mary whom the Catholics worship, she came across the yard carrying the littlest one, Willus, in her arms. When she saw her father's carriage she summoned all her self-possession and set the child carefully on the ground. Then she looked around as if wondering in which direction she could most quickly disappear. But the old man forestalled her. In a flash he was out of the door, had seized her, and drawn her inside. All in an instant!

"Now, down on your knees to her!" he ordered his son-in-law; "and kiss the hem of her dress!"

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Weak-willed as he was, Ansas was still able to refuse. But the old man lent him vigorous assistance, and there he was at her feet, saying with a sob, "I know I am a sinner in the sight of the Lord."

"Get up, Ansas," she said in her gentle way, putting her hand on his head. "If you humble yourself too far now you will not forgive me for it later; and then things will be no better than they were before." Ah, how well she knew him!

But for the moment he agreed to everything, promising the old man that Busza should no longer be allowed on the place and that she should be dismissed at once. Indra warned her father not to demand the impossible. But he was obdurate. It would have been better if he had not insisted.

"Busza! Where is that girl?"

At that moment she came in. She had tied up her face in a handkerchief, like a person with the toothache, and around her right arm she had bound a wet apron, to cool it off. Standing in the doorway she looked at the three of them in friendly fashion. "Well, what is it?" she asked. "I have work to do."

"You have no more work to do here," the old man shouted. "Your master will make that plain to you right away."

"That's interesting," she announced in the manner of a person sure of her ground.

Ansas Balczus had no notion where or how to begin. But since she was not exactly beautiful with her face bound up it was easier for him to speak.

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He stammered something about "peace in the family" and "one must make some sacrifice" and so on. He was not particularly dignified.

The girl laughed and laughed. "They've made you crawl, haven't they, you dirt-eater?" she said. "For that matter, you'll soon know where to find me." With that she turned and slammed the door behind her.

Now there could be peace again. And it seemed at first as if there would be. Ansas became very friendly towards his wife, and when he came home from the Heydekrug fish market he brought her a silk dress from Hoffmann's store. But he would look at her out of the corner of his eye, and as often as possible he would avoid her. Indra wrote home, "Everything is all right again"; but her tears dropped on the paper.

For Busza was once more about. She had taken lodgings with the Pilkuhns who lived back of the viaduct, and everybody in Wilwischken knew what sort of trash they were. She pretended to be working in the fields, but one could not go into the village without seeing her in one place or another. She even had the audacity to give sugar candy to the two Balczus children as they were coming home from school.

And where did Ansas go when night fell? No one knew. He wandered along the Parva where the willow shoots were so thick that none of the glow of evening penetrated to the water. And people sit-

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ting before their doors whispered as he went by, "He is going to meet Busza." Shameful as it was, it was the truth. There, where none of the glow of evening reached the water, they would sit far into the night and make their plans for the future. But however pleasant they might imagine it to be, Indra, his wife, stood always in the way.

"Get a divorce!" Get a divorce. Easily said. But the children! Endrik, the eldest, will inherit the place. Elska, who was fashioned in her father's very image, would soon be playing the piano. They were not the kind of children you could cast aside. Not to speak of little Willus. Besides, it was his father-in-law, rich old Jaksztat, who held the second mortgage. Who would put up the money if the loan was called?

But Indra had to go! Indra had to be got rid of! Indra with her butter face. Indra who spied upon him. Indra who ran from door to door evening after evening and reviled him to the neighbors. The Pilkuhns knew there was no shameful thing she had not said of him. Even that he had a hernia, she had told people. How else could the Pilkuhns have found out? Yes, that's the kind of person she is, for all her hypocritical virtue.

So Indra had to go. That was decided. What, with their pale faces, they couldn't decide was—how? Naturally, he wouldn't listen to the things she said. Yet after all it had to be done. Women sometimes die in childbirth. You scarcely need to

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help matters along at all. But that might take some time; and at best it was uncertain. Poison? The truth comes out. As surely as two and two make four. And the whole village always knows who did it. Drown her. But Indra never goes near the water. She had not once been in a boat the entire year. She might go, though. It would only take a little urging. Well, and then? Do you think she would jump in of her own accord? And even if she did, who would believe it? If you came back without her you would have to face an inquiry. Poison or drowning: one was as bad as the other.

But Busza had a clever head. Busza knew how to scheme. Could Ansas swim? Of course he could swim. But in heavy boots it's no good. You have to be dragged ashore like a fish in a net. What about going out barefooted? Everybody goes about barefooted in summer. Ansas never had done that, and everybody knew it. Could Indra swim? Like a duck made of lead; that was how Indra could swim.

"Then it will work," remarked Busza thoughtfully.

"What will work?"

Did he remember the accident last summer at the Windenburg bend where the two fishermen were drowned? How could he help remembering? Wasn't one of them his cousin? Did he know how it happened? No one knew exactly. But people assumed they were drunk and asleep when they

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reached the danger point, the point behind the lighthouse where the wind comes up suddenly and you have to keep a sharp lookout if you don't want to capsize like an overloaded hay-boat. Couldn't a boat be made to capsize deliberately? Yes, if a fellow wanted to drown himself. But a fellow could swim ashore. No one ever swam ashore there. But couldn't you do as the children do: tie yourself up in rushes or pig-bladders that keep you afloat for hours? Of course that could be done. But nobody ever did it, and it would make people talk. In that case Indra would have to be put out of the way in the usual manner. Yes, but how? Busza would think about it.

And so hour after hour, night after night, they talked and schemed. The girl asked questions and he answered. And from question to answer they baked over a slow fire the cake in which Indra was to find death.

The most difficult problem was still unsolved: how she might best be lured into the boat. There would have to be several outings without mishap before the blow could be struck. But how were such frequent outings to be justified? And how seldom it was a souther or a southwester blew up! Only with that kind of wind could their enterprise succeed, and then only if the wind was strong enough. Some special reason had to be contrived,—a reason different from all others. One which should make preliminary

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preparations unnecessary and could not be met with objections.

Meanwhile, however,—and this his mistress impressed forcibly upon him,—he must be on friendly terms with Indra so that she would suspect nothing and the neighbors would think all was well with them again. And he was friendly towards Indra,—friendly as far as can be seen by a person who has never in her life dissembled. He split the firewood into very small pieces and carried it in to her. He helped with the wool-winding. He repaired the damper in the chimney. He kissed her good morning and good night. He even slept beside her, although he did not touch her. When he came home at midnight Indra would press her body quietly to the wall in order not to breathe in the odor of the maid. For still Ansas carried that with him.

At length, upon Busza's insistence, he made the final sacrifice and went no more at night into the thick swampy meadows. Thereafter their sole intercourse was through the agency of the postman. Ansas had obtained a supply of addressed envelopes from a young lawyer's clerk in Heydekrug whom he had convinced that he could not write. Within these envelopes were symbols which only he and his mistress understood. Even Indra was induced to believe at last that the clandestine meetings had ceased. But she was not entirely deceived. There were times when she seemed to have the gift of second

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sight, and often when he was being particularly considerate of her she would say to herself, "How clearly I see through him." She had only to look at him in order to know that there was something unrevealed in his thoughts. And she would answer, "I do not need anything. I have the children." Then he would insist, "No, no. You must let me do something, if only because of the neighbors. And I want to give your father proof of my change of heart. Try to think of something, and I will rack my brains too." The next day he would speak of it again, but still she had thought of nothing. Thereupon he said one day, "Well, I have thought of something. You have never seen the railway. Let us go to Tilsit so that we can see the railway."

She answered, "People say the railway line is going to be extended to Memel. Heydekrug will then be a station. If it does go that far I shall be able to drive over with you some market day."

But that did not satisfy him. "Tilsit is a beautiful city," he said. "If you won't go there I shall know you are still angry and refuse to be friends with me. I have no other object than to spend my life trying to please you."

She remembered then that he had really given up his meetings with Busza and her protest became weaker. So she said, "Oh, Ansas, I know you do not sincerely mean it; but I must do as you wish. Anyway, we are in God's hands."

It was characteristic of Ansas that he blushed

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habitually like a young girl, and he knew it. Therefore he went straight out of the house, and in the yard he blushed for shame. But he told himself the thing had to be done and that there was no turning back. He felt as if a dragon with a fiery fork were urging him on. And so, later in the day, he began again.

"In Tilsit," he said, "there is a church steeple that is built up on eight round balls. Napoleon wanted to take it with him to France, but it was too heavy. A thing as strange as that ought to be seen."

Indra smiled at him, but said nothing.

"Then too," he went on, "there is a song that goes like this:

> Tilsit, my Tilsit, how lovely you are;
> You charm me now as always.
> The sun would be only a darkened star
> Did you not illumine its days.

Now surely you understand what a beautiful city Tilsit is."

While he was declaiming in this fashion Indra smiled at him again. Once more he flushed, and began to talk hastily of other things.

The next morning however he said in a casual tone, "Well, when do we start?" Just as if the matter had long been settled. She thought, "If he wants to be rid of me he can do it in a thousand ways. The best thing is to submit." So she said to him, "Whenever you wish to go." "In that case, the sooner the

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better," said he; and they fixed upon the next morning.

Precisely as Busza had ordered, he went from house to house that day, saying, "You know, dear neighbors, that I have behaved very badly. But from now on everything will be different. To prove it, I am going to take a pleasure trip with Indra to Tilsit. You might say we are going to celebrate our reconciliation."

The neighbors congratulated him, just as Busza had said they would.

Meanwhile, Indra was about her own affairs. She put the children's things in order and wrote out what they were to wear each day and on Sunday, and how many pieces of linen, which she had woven herself, were to be cut out and sewed. Then she made provision for the distribution of her personal belongings: the new silk dress was to go to Anna Doczys; the heirlooms were to be Elska's. And she laid out her shroud and whatever else she would be wearing in her coffin. And thus she made ready for the excursion.

The children were at play outside in the yard. Indra thought, "Poor darlings, you will see hard times when Busza comes back."

Soon after Ansas had gone she went across to Anna Doczys' and said to her, "Things happen so easily. I know I shall not return from this journey."

Anna was terrified. "Why shouldn't you come

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back?" she asked. "Tilsit is only a cat's jump from here. And this is to be a reconciliation trip."

Indra smiled. "We'll see about that," she said. "But promise me that you will look out for the children and write their grandfather if things go wrong with them."

Anna wept and promised everything, and then Indra went home. She put the children to bed, prayed with them, and found strength in the Lord. Early in the morning, long before the sun was up, she and Ansas left.

He had on his Sunday clothes, and Indra had also dressed up, for they were celebrating their reconciliation. She wore her red *margina* with the green stripes, the homespun costume in which nine years before she had gone to the altar, and she had a bright kerchief over her head to ward off the sun's rays. The food and drink which she had prepared she stored forward in the boat, under the seat. Ansas was wearing his wading boots, but he held his lightweight Sunday boots in his hand. At the last moment he brought forward something stowed into a canvas sack. This he threw down beside him at the helm. Then he looked furtively towards her as if anticipating a question. But Indra asked no question. While he was adjusting the mainsail she saw that his hands were trembling. He was conscious of it and sought to distract her attention. "There is a nice breeze," he said. "We ought to be in Tilsit by noon." She

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said, "It doesn't matter to me." And he went on: "If we get there as soon as that, we shall have to tack back." Then he unfurled the swordsail and set the *raginnis*, the foresail. He sat there half covered over by the canvas so that she could scarcely see him.

The boat sailed along on an even keel and all around them the little fish gurgled in the water. Towards the west what looked like a blue-grey blanket lay over the harbor, but the narrow tongue of land beyond was dark red in the morning light. Not until they came round the Windenburg bend where the neck of land projects abruptly into the water did he loosen the sail cord. Then with a quick stroke he turned the helm. From now on they were to sail directly east under a full wind.

It was at this point that Indra always grew uneasy when she went to visit her father in Minga. Here the accidents always occurred. In her anxiety she turned towards her beloved Minga, now clearly visible in the distance, and she said to herself, "Oh, father, if only you knew the dark road your Indra has taken!" But she felt herself in the Lord's hands and at peace with Him. It was only the treacherous bend that made her heart contract.

The boat glided into the estuary, with its bands of grass to right and left, which seemed for a long time to have been waiting for them. Before them lay the broad Atmath, a river tributary to the Memel and equally wide, its surface covered with ripples raised by the eager little breeze.

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"Two mouthfuls more of wind wouldn't hurt," said Ansas, half turning towards her. "For when the counter current is weak this boat knows it."

Her mind was on Minga and her wish was to be there. But Minga lay far behind. Before them lay Kuwertshof, those low meadows among the waters of which people said that unless you were duckfooted you couldn't live there, for without webbed feet you could go neither backward nor forward.

Indra remembered. "No more can I go either backward or forward," she thought. "I must stand still wherever he orders."

At this point they came to the great bend to the south, and the sails veered to the side so that she was now able to see Ansas clearly. She was sitting on the forward seat, looking back towards him who stood aft at the helm. The mast rose between them. He seemed to her to be trying to hide from her gaze, turning to right and turning to left, but to no avail. "Poor man," she thought; "I should not like to be in your place." And she smiled sadly at him, so sorry was she for him.

Now on their right they saw Russ where the great landlords live and where they drink more than anywhere else in the world. Even government officials are afraid of the punch brewed in Russ. And then they came to the timber wharves and saw the logs on their many floats, and passed first one sawmill and another and then another. The *dzimken*, the rivermen who bring the logs downstream from Russia,

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were sitting in their long grey smocks on the edge of the rafts, bathing their feet. Behind them smoked their breakfast kettles.

"He is going to give me poison," she said to herself. But she still had beside her the food she had brought, and she was resolved to eat nothing else.

The island of Brionischken rose up with its new sawmill. Here too the log floats were tied up, and the *dzimken*, who must have their music night and day, were already singing in chorus. She knew one of their songs:

Lytus lynòyu, rasà rasòyu,
O mùdu abùdu lovò gulèyu.

"If things were still as they used to be," she thought, "we would be singing with them."

The *dzimken* waved to them invitingly, but neither responded. This was not the first time they had been hailed that morning, nor the first time they had returned no greeting.

Behind Russ, as everybody knows, lies a very dreary stretch of country. On the left is the Medszokel moor where only the poorest of the poor live; and on the right is the Bredszul moor which is not much of a place either. But back of them, topping the hills and heights, is the Ibenhorst forest, where the wild elk roam. Indra's thoughts went back to a spring day seven years before. She had been carrying Elska for nearly six months and was of little use about the house.

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Ansas had said one day, "Let's take a trip to Ibenhorst. We may be able to see the elk in the forest." But that day he did not take the sailboat, for it was too large to move easily in the little streams. Instead, he had taken a rowboat. Sitting close to each other, they had moved hour after hour through the confusion of tiny floating islets and reeds and rushes. She had lain with her head in his lap and had said again and again, "Oh, why do we have to see the elk? it is so wonderful like this." But finally they had seen an elk, a powerful bull with antlers like two windmill vanes. He was standing among the reeds very close to the water, ruminating and looking them over. Ansas had said, "He doesn't seem very wild. I'm going to jump at him." But little Elska in Indra's womb objected. She gave a terrific kick. And when Indra told him that, he couldn't turn back quickly enough. And now she could not help thinking of that spring day. And in the midst of her resignation, grief suddenly overwhelmed her so that she clasped her hands against her forehead and sobbed out, "God! O God! O God!"

She saw Ansas make the helm fast and step across the mainmast bench to her side; and she heard him ask, "Why do you moan like that?"

She raised her eyes to him. "Oh, Ansas, Ansas. Don't you know better than I why I moan?"

He turned on his heel without a word and went back to the helm.

On one of the oncoming rafts a *dzimka* was playing

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the harmonica. "Now Elska will never learn to play the piano," Indra thought. "And Willus will never be a minister"—for she had resolved that this should be, because it was pleasing in God's sight. And then she thought, "He must promise me that first." But how was she to know when the terrible thing was about to happen so that she might have time to plead with him? It might happen at any moment. There were long stretches when even on the river banks there were no signs of life.

"What can he possibly have in that canvas bag?" she wondered now. "It must be what he is going to do it with. But what can it be?" The package was round, half a man's height in length, and about as thick as a milkpail. When, upon leaving, he had thrown it down, there had been no sound; therefore it weighed little. "The best way," she thought, "is to let come what will and use the time to make my peace with the Lord." But the Lord had long ago filled her with peace. She scarcely knew now what to pray for, since to pray to be saved seemed to her unworthy. After all, she had only to cry out when a raft came near. So she prayed for the children. One after the other. And then she began over again.

How much time went by this way she could not say. But the sun was already high in the heavens when she heard him call out: "I am hungry. Bring me something to eat." Her heart rose suddenly in her throat. "The time has come," she said to herself. But the hands with which she dealt out to him

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sausage, lampreys, and buttered bread, did not tremble. Another thought had come to her. "No, it won't come this way. He will find some other way." And then when he asked, "Aren't you eating anything?" she thought suddenly, "It isn't going to happen at all; it was all something I imagined." But she had only to look at him sitting there, his body bent double, his eyes fixed on a point in space or on the water—anywhere except on her, to know that it would, after all, happen. All at once she found the courage to ask, "What have you there in that bag?" He screwed up his mouth sullenly and answered, "My rubber boots." But she knew that could not be true, for their heels were studded with iron pegs which would have sounded when the sack was thrown down. She packed away the remainder of the food and returned to her end of the boat.

They had left the poverty stricken marsh lands far behind. The black edge of the forest had sunk below the horizon, and behind the dike stretched the fertile lowlands, where an acre of land cost a thousand marks and all the peasants had red wine at table. Then came the Klocken ferry and behind it Kaukehmen, the rich market-town at whose best inn only cultured people were received. "When Willus is a minister he will be able to stop there. . . . But Willus will never be a minister. Would Busza ever let him go to high school?" It went on thus for perhaps an hour, and they came to the point where the Gilga branches off. She watched the smooth

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waters disappear into the green lands on the right, but she asked no question.

Abruptly Ansas spoke. "See, Indra, from now on we leave the Russ river. This is now the Memel."

She thanked him for telling her this, and silence fell once more. It lasted until Ansas suddenly raised his arm and pointed gayly straight ahead. She turned round and asked, "What is it?"

"What could it be?" he answered. "It is Tilsit."

But she did not look towards Tilsit. She looked only at him. He was beaming at the thought that they had arrived so soon. "No, it will not happen," she thought. "No one who had those terrible things inside him could be happy."

Then he became quite cross because she had so little curiosity. "Look. There they are building the great railway station," he said. "And behind, you can see Napoleon's church steeple. But you aren't even looking round."

She told him she was sorry and allowed him to explain and point out everything to her. And thus they came nearer and nearer.

She had never seen anything like the piers that grew up out of the water, and the iron cranes suspended in air like the handles of the nets at fishing time. "It was all nonsense," she thought. "Nothing is going to happen." She saw more timber yards, as big as the Aneker yards in Russ; they passed smokestack after smokestack; and then the city itself with buildings higher even than the grain elevators at

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Memel, where she used occasionally to go with him on market days in order to look at the sea. She had imagined that Napoleon's church steeple would be more wonderful. The eight balls were there, of course. But the masonry was built above them in such a way that there seemed nothing extraordinary about it.

Ansas drew in the sails and steered towards the rocky bank. A pair of fishing boats were moored where he tied his boat, and he exchanged greetings with their owners. They were people from Tawa and Insa who had sold their catch that morning. "Have you people from Wilwischken come to undersell us?" one of them asked spitefully. Ansas, who was drawing on his Sunday boots, did not answer. He was too proud to answer such a question.

Indra spread a white cloth over the forward seat and set out the food. With the lampreys and the sausage she had also packed eggs boiled in salt water and home-cured salmon. Having eaten nothing since half past three in the morning, she now realized that for a long time she had been weak with hunger. They sat side by side on the edge of the boat and made a noonday meal of their provisions. Ansas was more than well enough off to go to a good inn and be served of the best. But that is not the fisherman's way.

Indra was quite forgetting to think of her terrible fate; nevertheless, after such fears her heart still lay like a stone in her breast. It was now Ansas' turn to

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eat sparingly, for his eagerness to show her everything made him impatient of delay. He stood up and said, "Now we can be off." But before they left he made sure of the padlock, lest in the meantime the boat disappear. In doing this his foot happened to kick against the round sack which lay by the helm. It was so light that it flew into the air of itself and then sank back into place. Indra saw how this frightened him and how furtively he looked round to see if she had observed anything. And the stone in her breast grew heavier.

As they went along the bank, he pointing things out to her, she thought again, "It can't be true. He must have something else on his mind." Then they turned into a street as wide as a river and lined with great shops in which you could buy anything imaginable, and where everything was much finer and prettier than in Memel. "This," said Ansas, pointing to a sign that read *Dekomin—Pastry Shop,* "is the best of them." And since a cold lunch is never altogether satisfying, they decided to go right in. What a sight Indra saw when they went in! There was a long narrow room, cool and dim, with a table along one side that extended from one end of the room to the other, and it was entirely covered with cakes and tarts and other sweets of all kinds.

"Let's have a good time," said Ansas, pulling himself up.

But Indra was still unsure of herself, and he had to put the pastries one by one on her plate. Besides

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this, he ordered a delicate rose liqueur which was as sweet as heaven and stuck to the fingers so that one had to keep licking it off.

"Mayn't I take something back to the children?" she asked.

"Why, of course," he said, laughing.

Suddenly her heart was pierced by the thought that perhaps she would never see the children again. She turned her anguished eyes upon him and saw that his face was transformed. His mouth was open, his cheeks were quite hollow, and his eyes were staring beyond her. "It will have to be," she thought, and put her teaspoon aside. Not another morsel did she eat. She merely wiped up with her fingertips the crumbs strewn round her plate on the stone-topped table and thought—but of what was she thinking? Nothing. He too sat as if stricken dumb and said not a word. So it really was going to happen!

Finally he stood up and said, "Well, have them wrap up what you want." But she could not stir. "You get the things," she said, and he went over to the table to make his choice. He seemed not to know what he was doing, for his eyes went back again and again to her as if he were about to say something but did not trust himself to speak.

They went out into the broiling afternoon sun, and in the street he pulled himself together and took up again his rôle as guide. This was this and that was that, but now she scarcely heard one word. Grief came and went like waves on a shore. They stopped

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before a shop window in which children's things were displayed. "We'll go in here," she said. "You can take the children a souvenir."

"Souvenir? Of whom?" he stammered.

"Of me," she said, and looked steadily at him.

Once more he flushed. He turned away his eyes and asked no further question. Surely it was going to happen.

For Endrik she chose a washable pinafore with red stripes, to keep him clean when he played in the sand; for Elska, a blue bonnet to wear in the sun; and for little Willus—what could they get for him? —a bib to wear under his chin. "Perhaps it will turn into a minister's collar," she thought, holding back her tears.

The young clerk said to Ansas as he was wrapping the package, "Isn't there also something you would like for madame, your wife?"

Ansas was at once embarrassed and flattered because the clerk had called Indra *madame*. This was a term not often applied to a Lithuanian fisherman's wife.

The young man went on: "Couldn't I show you our fine veilings? For if I may venture to remark upon it, the veil madame is wearing seems quite soaked through."

Indra was startled and went over to a mirror. Until now she had not been in a mood to look at herself. The young man quickly brought forth his

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materials. They were as sheer as cobwebs and had designs like those in the loveliest mull curtains. Ansas chose the most expensive of all—he dared not tell Indra how expensive—and the young man led Indra to a wall in which there was an immense mirror. After she had knotted the veil at the back of her neck so that her ears were covered and her eyes shaded, he put on the finishing touches, designed to heighten the charm of the effect.

"How beautiful madame is!" he exclaimed again and again. "Never has this mirror seen anything more beautiful." Indra was almost frightened to see how pleased Ansas was. They were on their way out when Ansas turned back to ask the young man if he knew at what hour the trains ran.

"Incoming or outgoing?" asked the young man.

That did not matter, said Ansas.

Then the young man smiled and said that one train was due in soon after four and another went out at about six. One could take one's choice.

Ansas thanked him. Out in the street he said, "Let's have a look at the one going out, for then we can see it disappear in the distance." But it was a long time until six o'clock. What were they to do?

Indra did not mind. She was thinking, "If it is really going to happen, why should he spend so much money on me?" And again hope filled her heart.

Ansas had stopped before a wall to read a poster printed in German.

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JACOBSRUH
To-day at Four
GREAT MILITARY CONCERT
by the Band of the
PRINCE ALBERT REGIMENT OF
LITHUANIAN DRAGOONS

Beneath was printed everything that would be played.

The stone in Indra's breast had now become light; indeed, she could scarcely feel its weight. She doubted that Lithuanians might be allowed to attend a celebration which was obviously intended for Germans; and besides, she was dressed in the national costume. But Ansas made fun of her. Whoever had the price of admission was invited, he said, whether he spoke *wokiszkai* or *lietuwiszkai.* Indra was still dubious. Only the thought that a Lithuanian regiment furnished the music abated her modesty somewhat.

So they rode together in a droshky to Jacobsruh, the amusement park which, as everybody knows, is more beautiful than anything else on earth. Indra had never seen trees so high and so thick with leaves, not even in Heydekrug or in Memel. As for their own bay with its dwarf willows and alders, it could certainly not compare with such a temple of foliage.

In spite of her happiness she was nervous in this strange place, for all about her only city folk were seated at the red-topped tables. And when Ansas went forward to find a seat there was such a craning

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of necks that she wished the earth might open and swallow them up. But Ansas, for his part, was unperturbed. He soon found an empty table, brushed the dust from the chairs with his handkerchief, and ordered the elegant German waiter to bring them coffee and cake. Just as the others did. That was the kind of courage Ansas had. With him one felt like somebody, and that all one's nervousness was childish.

Not far from them stood a small hall whose vaulted ceiling rose above slender iron pillars. Soon it was filled with bright blue soldiers, so many of them, and all so gay! Although there were three or four unkempt vagabonds standing about, the concert began.

First came a piece entitled *Rosenwalzer*. This was the name they read on the program which Ansas had bought from the ticket-seller. Listening to the music was like being wafted to heaven. Right in front of the bandstand two little children had put their arms around one another and were dancing. It made one feel like dancing too. And to think that only an hour ago she had been suffering mortal torment!

When the music stopped everybody clapped, and Indra clapped too. Now there was silence about them, except for the rattling of the coffee cups. Ansas sat there motionless. She was about to ask him a question—things were going so well with them—when he motioned her to listen to the conversation

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on their left. At the next table a lady and a gentleman were talking about her.

"When a Lithuanian woman is pretty she is much prettier than we German women," the lady was saying.

And the man answered: "That pale loveliness of hers makes one think of a Madonna of—" and then came a name Indra could not understand. She did not even know what a madonna was. She would have given anything to ask Ansas, who knew everything, but she was ashamed. At that moment she saw the look in Ansas' face as he glanced at her, and she was certain of what she had only suspected before—that he was proud of her, and that she need no longer fear him.

The intermission ended and a new composition was played. It was called *Zar und Zimmermann.* The *Zar* is the Russian Kaiser: she quite understood that music might be written about him. But why a carpenter should be so honored,—a man who wore dirty overalls and was constantly measuring beams,—that was a mystery. Then came a third piece which was not at all pretty and which made one's head ache. Somebody called Beethoven had thought that up.

And thereafter came something real! Even in your dreams you could never imagine anything so beautiful on earth. It was *Die Post im Walde.* A trumpeter, who had left his seat before they began, played the air softly and yearningly in the distance while the others accompanied him in a tone that was

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ever so low. Listening to it, you forgot that you were human. And in order that these strange Germans sitting about might not see how deeply she was affected she sprang up quickly, hastened through the crowd and around the bandstand, past some tables to a spot beyond the trees where it was quiet and only empty benches stood. There she sat down, raised her new veil from her eyes to keep it from getting wet, and cried,—cried from the very bottom of her heart.

Some one sat down beside her and took her hand. Of course it was Ansas; she knew that, although she was blinded by her tears. Leaning her head against his shoulder, and still sobbing, she said, "Ansas darling, my Ansuttis, please, please, don't do anything to me, don't do anything to me."

She knew that he no longer meant her harm. But she could not help herself; she had to go on begging him.

He shuddered from head to foot. Clasping her hand tightly in his, he said again and again, "What are you talking about? What are you talking about?"

She answered, "It is not right yet. Until you confess, things will not be right between us."

He said, "I have nothing to confess."

She stroked his arm and said, "Yes, you will confess it later. I know you will." But he insisted that there was nothing to confess, and she pretended to be satisfied. But when she thought of Busza lying

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in wait at home in the village, cold shivers ran up and down her spine.

With clasped hands they went back to their table, where they paid no more heed to the people who seemed never to tire of looking at them. The coffee cups had by this time been removed and been replaced by beer glasses. Ansas gave his order to the finely dressed waiter, but it was not beer he asked for. He ordered a bottle of the sweet muscatel the Lithuanians love to drink. They looked into one another's eyes and drank, until at length Indra found courage to ask, "Ansas darling, what is a—madonna?"

"That is what they call the Blessed Catholic Virgin," he told her.

Her lip curled in scorn. "Is that all?" she said. When she was a young girl she had been called that by envious people who wished to annoy her, for she had always been a devout Lutheran. They went on drinking until Indra felt her cheeks grow red and scarcely knew what to do with her gayety. Suddenly Ansas said, "Great heavens, the train! It is almost six!"

He called the grand waiter and paid him with two hard thalers. Then he asked the shortest way to the station. And just because they happened to be in a hurry, they found they could hardly stand on their feet. People laughed behind their backs, and the lady at the next table said regretfully, "These Lithuanians all have to get drunk." If she had known

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what they were celebrating, she would probably not have said that.

The street to the station lay pretty much alongside the railway line. They ran and laughed and ran on. Of a sudden they heard a sound: *Puff puff puff!* Heavens! What was that terrible monster coming towards them, running them down! Indra seized Ansas by the arm. "Is that it?" Yes, that was it.

How could there be such a monster? Pukys, with his tail of fire, and Atwars, the other dragon, were nothing in comparison. She screamed and covered her eyes and scarcely knew whether to go on laughing or burst into tears. But because Ansas was her protector she decided to laugh and to pull down the apron with which she had covered her face. She imitated the sound, *puff puff!* just as Elska would have done if she had seen the big dragon in which people travel.

"Where are they going?" she asked as the last car rolled by.

"First to Insterburg," Ansas told her. "Then to Koenigsberg, and then farther and farther, on to Berlin."

"Won't we go to Berlin some time?" she begged.

"When everything is settled," he said, "we will go to Berlin to see the Kaiser." He was all at once as firmly in earnest as if he were taking a vow. How beautiful life is, O God! And life would grow more and more beautiful.

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On their way back to the center of town, as they were passing the Anger, that great stretch of sand, barren of houses, where the horse and cattle markets are held, they heard from behind the shrubbery bordering the walk the gay notes of a barrel-organ. Through the branches they could see the glint of purple and tinsel.

I should like to know the Lithuanian who can pass a merry-go-round without stopping.

The sun was already half way down behind the houses, and Ansas was planning to feed his cattle early in the morning. But where was the harm in loitering a bit when one had fourteen hours of cruising still to do? As they stood before the velvet-hung canopy where the showy saddles and sleigh seats seemed to be waiting only for them, Ansas looked up abruptly almost in alarm at the canvas roof at whose tip a yellow pennant was fluttering. Indra looked up too without knowing why. He looked from the pennant to the weather vanes on the surrounding roofs. They corresponded! The wind had veered to the south, and they would not have to tack slowly back. They could reach home in seven hours.

So, up on the horses! Indra held back a little. A mother of three children!—was it proper? But no one in Tilsit knew her. And so up on the horses it was, for they might start again without her.

Ansas and Indra rode on the horses, and rode again, and then again and again and again, until at

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last they were too dizzy to go on. The whole world had finally become a wheel, and the sky galloped backwards around them like a fiery top. But still they rode, and as they rode they sang

> Tilsit, my Tilsit, how lovely you are,
> You charm me now as always.
> The sun would be only a darkened star
> Did you not illumine its days.

And the children loitering about, who had already been treated to three rides, sang gratefully with them, although they could catch neither the words nor the tune.

At length Indra felt quite sick. Whether she wanted to or not, she had to stop. Then they both stood laughing and rather stunned among the caroling children, and distributed into their outstretched palms the crumbs of the cakes on which they had sat without knowing it during their many rides. Life can be so beautiful when one is in love and riding on the merry-go-round!

They said good-by to the nursemaids and the children, some of whom followed them as they went. To show them the way, they said, but really to get another bit of cake. And they would have got their fill if they had gone as far as the Dekomin shop. But that lay at the other end of the town. Ansas and Indra went back there and had a new package made up. This time, however, it was Indra who chose the cakes. Meanwhile, Ansas ordered two glasses of the

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sticky rose liqueur; and to be on the safe side he took a whole bottle with him.

The sun had long since gone down by the time they were back at their boat. But that did not matter, for the south wind was still blowing and the moon was making ready to light their way. A trip like this was no more than child's play. Ansas bailed out the water with a dipper so that the bottom of the boat would be nicely dry if Indra should wish to lie down. But Indra did not care to lie down. She sat up forward in her old seat where, undisturbed, she could fill her contented gaze with Ansas. Then they got off.

The banks grew darker and a vast silence spread over them. Indra could not help thinking with how heavy a heart she had followed the same course eight hours earlier, and how freely she breathed now. She was impatient to offer a prayer of thanksgiving, but now she would not pray alone. Ansas was hers again, and he needed this prayer as much as she. But for the moment his mind was on sail and helm, for the post of the piers jutted out into the water, and many boats were anchored on both sides of them. From time to time he would nod tenderly in her direction. That was all.

After a bit the river widened and the moon rose. The little waves, silvered by its light, fluttered down and then started up like little white birds. She could see Ansas clearly, but the moon was at her back and

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he could not see her. Therefore he said, "Why do you sit so far away from me?"

"This is where I sat coming up," she said.

"Coming up and going down are as different as day and night," he answered.

And she thought, "Only, now it is day, and then it was night."

"Come, sit near me," he said; and how gladly she obeyed him!

But as she came towards him her eyes fell upon the canvas bag which lay at his feet and which she had not noticed this evening. The sight of it filled her with pain again. Sinking down upon the middle seat, she leaned back against the mast.

"Why don't you come?" he said almost crossly.

She did not know what to do. Should she question him? Should she say nothing and go silently to him? One thing she knew: There where the sack lay tight and round, the sack about whose contents he had lied, there she could not set foot. She would feel as if she were stepping on a snake's nest. But light must be shed, her heart told her, on what had gone before. And it must be done now. She steeled her heart and spoke.

"Ansas darling, aren't you going to tell me what you have in that canvas bag?"

He jumped as though one of the snakes in the nest had stung him; but he said nothing. He turned his head away, and she could see that he was shaking. Then she stood up and laid her hand on his shoulder,

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careful meanwhile not to go too close to the canvas bag.

"Ansas," she said, "everything is as it should be between us again. But until you confess, the evil will stay in your thoughts."

He was still silent, but she felt him trembling.

"And besides, darling," she went on, "there is the good Lord to think of. I was going to pray before, but the words stuck in my throat, because you were not praying with me. So confess now and we will pray together."

Then he fell to his knees before her and clasped his arms about her and confessed everything.

When he had finished she stroked his head. "Poor, poor darling," she said. "We must pray with all our heart so that God will forgive us." She dropped to her knees beside him, folded her hands into his, and for a long time they prayed together. He had to get up from time to time to attend to the boat, and she would wait in her prayer until he had returned. When they had done praying, she blessed him and he blessed her, and they got up. Both felt cleansed and happy. But he had forgotten to tell her what was in the canvas bag. She pointed to it and asked again. He turned away, filled with shame. She said, "I will open it myself"; and he did not deter her. When she saw in the bag nothing but two bundles of green rushes, tied round with twine, she laughed and said, "Is this your wicked mystery?" But he grew more and more ashamed. Slowly she

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understood that after the boat had capsized he was to have swum off the way children do in deep water.

"That is the kind of beast I have become," he moaned, and beat his breast with his fists.

But Indra smiled and said, "Come now, Ansas. No man should despise himself too severely; he should not lower himself too far in his own eyes." Thus she not only forgave him, but she helped him to regain his soul.

Sitting beside him—for he wanted her very close to him—she saw that her body interfered with the management of the helm. So she spread at his feet the white picnic cloth which had been lying on the forward seat and arranged herself upon it in such fashion as to pillow her head on his knees. And now it was exactly as it had been in the Ibenhorst when Elska was still on the way. And thus they sailed onward, filled with so much happiness that they had nothing to say to one another.

From the meadows along the shore came the scent of sweet-grass. Thyme and mint, wild marjoram and timothy grass,—all the pungent herbs sent their recognizable aromas across the water. The dike along the river rolled by like a smooth green-blue ribbon. Wherever the turf had by chance crept down the slope, it gleamed like a mound of snow. And the moonbeams lay so brightly on the water that Ansas had to watch his course among them with care. There was not much to be heard except the plop of the little fish in their insect hunt. Only the night-

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birds were still awake. When they passed a forest or a garden they could hear in the stillness the strange notes of the nightingale and the mating call of the bush-quail. Even a lapwing sang from time to time, although he should long ago have been asleep.

Out of the darkness music came. It was the *dzimken* who had tied up their rafts to the piles for the night. God knows when they sleep! By day they row and sing, and by night they sing. They were lying round their fires, and while one of them played the harmonica the others sang. The song they were singing was *My Daughter Simonena*, that lovely song that everybody knows, either in Russian or in Prussian. Oh, yes, Simonena, who bore a little son and never knew how it happened. That might happen to almost anybody. But Simonena's boy became a *hetman*,—at least in her dream.

"We must make Willus a minister," Indra pleaded, looking coaxingly into Ansas's eyes.

"Willus shall be a minister," he answered solemnly. And Indra was happy. Things promised in such an hour come true of their own accord.

Thus they passed this raft and came soon to another, where one was playing a fiddle and the rest were singing:

'Neath the maples where the spring runs,
Where the sons of gods are dancing,
Nightly in the moonlight dancing
With the daughters of the gods. . . .

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Ansas and Indra sang with them. The *dzimken*, hearing a woman's voice, called to them, "*Labs wakars!*" By way of thanking them for their friendly "good night" Ansas drew in sail and ran alongside their raft. They all crowded towards the boat,—five of them. And the Jew who owned the raft came too. Ansas gave them some of the rose liqueur he had bought, and they swore they had never in their lives tasted anything as wonderful. Then they all sang in chorus the song about the daughters of the gods, of the ring which fell into the deep, and of the two swans that troubled the waters. Ansas and Indra shook hands with them when they got ready to leave, and the Jew hoped they would live "another hundred years." Had it been only a hundred hours, Ansas could have found use for them. Since the bottle of rose liqueur had been produced, it seemed foolish to stow it away again. So they drank it to the last drop and felt merrier than ever.

They passed many other rafts on the river and joined in the singing as well as they could. But their voices were not very steady. The liqueur was to blame for that. Many times the desire to sleep came over them, but they were on their guard. Otherwise, God only knows on what sandbank they might have found themselves stranded. Nevertheless, Ansas felt he must slide down from the bench on to the floor of the boat. In this way he could hold Indra in his left arm while he steered with his right. And Indra, lying with her head on his breast, thought

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blissfully, "Endrik . . . Elska . . . and Willus . . . now we five are one."

Before they knew it they found themselves off Russ. They realized it only when they saw the Brionischken chimney-stack pointing like a warning finger and seeming to say, "Take care!" The *dzimken* who had moored their rafts here were actually asleep. Their fires were out. But what did their silence matter? There is a song of Russ which goes like this:

> Two fishermen,
> Two fine lads,
> Set out from Russ one day,
> Westward to the bay. . . .

Ansas and Indra sang the song out of full throats. When they had finished, their throats were dry, and they looked for the bottle of rose liqueur. Alas, who would have believed it? The bottle was empty.

They laughed and laughed at this, and Ansas grew ever more pressingly tender. "Ansas darling," pleaded Indra. "Here we come to the great bend, and then we turn westward. Until we get that far you must look carefully to your steering."

Ansas obeyed. Here was the smooth Sziesza river where the bend began. He hauled in sail and veered to the left. It was hard going now, but they were making headway. From this point on to Windenburg, a mile and a half away, the river runs as straight as a railway track. Down at the mouth of the Mola there is one slight curve, the only one.

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At Windenburg, where the south wind comes up like a hurricane from the wide deep bay,—there is where a man wants to keep his eyes peeled. But Windenburg is a long way off . . . a long way . . . a long long way.

"Indra, you say you have really forgiven me my sins; but you have got to prove that to me."

"Ansas, dearest, you must be careful."

"Be careful! What does caution matter when a man who has been living blind and bewitched beside the loveliest and the best of women, beside a daughter of the gods, suddenly opens his eyes!" . . .

"Ansas!"

"My Indra!"

Blissfully at peace, they lay close in each other's arms while the boat sailed on as if Laima herself were at the helm.

"Ansas, you must not fall asleep!"

"Of course not. How could I go to sleep?"

"Ansas, if one of us falls asleep, the other must wake him."

"Yes . . . the other . . . must . . . wake him."

"Ansas darling, you are asleep!"

"Anybody who says so is asleep himself."

"Ansas, Ansas, wake up!"

"I am awake; are you?"

And thus they fell asleep.

Anna Doczys tossed restlessly in her bed. So she awoke her husband. "Doczys! Get up. We are going out on the bay!"

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"What are we going out on the bay for?" asked Doczys, rubbing his eyes. "My fishing will wait until morning."

"Indra talked so crazily," said Anna, "that I think we ought to go out to meet them."

With a groan he submitted, dressed, and they set sail.

Day had already dawned when they moved out into the bay, and the morning fog lay so thick about them that they could not see a hand-span before them.

"Which way shall I go?" asked Doczys.

"Over Windenburg way," commanded his wife.

The south wind hurled short crisp waves against them, and they had to tack. Suddenly Anna listened intently. A voice, a woman's voice, was calling for help through the fog.

"Go straight out to her!" cried Anna. He was forced to tack, so that it was some time before they drew near, very near, to where they found Indra, floating on the water, tossed to and fro by the waves. They wondered that she had not drowned, until they saw bound around her, and half rising above the water, two bundles of green rushes tied together with twine across her back. When they drew her into the boat she was moaning, "Ansas! Save Ansas, save Ansas!"

Yes, but where was Ansas? She did not know. Her last recollection of him was when she came up out of the water and felt his hands, as he trod water,

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binding the rushes about her body. That was the last she knew of him.

They called and searched and called again. But they did not find him. They found only the overturned boat. He might have clung to it easily, but he must have swum off in order to fasten the rushes about Indra, and been unable to get back. Five long hours they searched, while Indra knelt in the bottom of the boat and prayed for a miracle. But there was no miracle. Two days later Ansas lay face upward in peace upon the shore.

Nine months after the death of Ansas Indra bore him a son. He was christened according to her desire, Galas, a Lithuanian word which is like the Latin *Finis*. But since the name was so extraordinary, people generally called the child by his father's name. To-day he is a highly respected man.

Endrik looked after his father's property in careful fashion. Elska married a well-to-do landowner. And Willus did become the pastor of a flock. In his parish they think him the messenger of the Lord, and even the dissenting pietists are faithful to him. Indra is now an old woman, living quietly with her eldest son. When she goes to church all the parish bows down before her. She knows that it will not be long before she is again with Ansas, in heaven. For God is merciful unto sinners.

May He be merciful unto us!

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MIKS BUMBULLIS

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MIKS BUMBULLIS

GRIGAS and Eva had been to the Midsummer Night celebration. On their way home they had taken refuge in the bushes, as young people have a perfect right to do. And when, furtive and ashamed, they neared the gamekeeper's house, broad daylight was upon them.

Grigas was the first to notice that the lamp was still burning in the master's living room. Quickly he motioned to Eva to steal into the house through the back door while he pretended to have begun his day's work. He went over to the woodpile and threw a few alder chunks noisily and meaninglessly about, hoping in this way to attract the old gamekeeper's attention to himself and make it easier for Eva to creep in unobserved. But the voice of his master was silent.

"Must have fallen asleep on the sofa," he thought; and he lit his pipe with an easier conscience. Just then he looked up and saw that Eva was making violent gestures to him from the gabled end of the house. He tiptoed over and learned to his great astonishment that when she had gone to look at little Anikka's crib, she had found it empty.

Anikka was the four-year-old child of a far-away nephew whom the old man had adopted after her father had disappeared and her mother had died of

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grief and pneumonia. Grigas's first thought was that one of the elves might have carried the child off. For even the stupidest people know that these elves do carry children off and make changelings of them, ever so long after they have been baptized. Eva, however, who usually agreed with him, was not sure he was right this time. The burning lamp, the stillness of the house—No. And something else which she had noticed before, when passing close to the living room, was against it: the window was shut, but one of the panes of glass had been shattered.

Grigas summoned all his nerve and forced himself to peer into the lighted room. There on the floor was old Curlybeard lying in his own blood, and in one outstretched arm lay the sleeping child. Weeping and wailing never brought the dead to life again. And they knew at once who had done it: "Miks Bumbullis," they said almost in the same breath.

Two days before, Miks Bumbullis had been caught by the gamekeeper, just as he was saying a *Tewe musso* over a freshly killed roe. The *Paternoster* is usually a charm against being caught; but this time it did Miks no good. He even had to hand over his gun. The only reason why the old man did not arrest him was that he knew perfectly well the prisoner would overpower him on the way in, despite the loss of the gun.

Grigas could not help thinking of that incident. For there was no joking with Miks Bumbullis. Whenever a heavy load was carried across the border,

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whenever a cart was found standing horseless, whenever a Jew's strong *schnaps* was found poured into the road, you could be sure it was the work of Miks Bumbullis. And along with this, his confounded poaching.

Miks might have been very well off. Far and near the farmers' daughters were after him. Even a young widow. And what a widow! One with a farm of a hundred and twenty acres. Twice already she had sent a marriage broker to him. But would he have her? Not if any one knew it.

Grigas and Eva lifted the child out of the rigid arm and drew off her blood-stained tear-damp dress without awakening her. They put her down on the bright red cushion, where she lay smiling like a little angel. They were about to wash the corpse and lay it out when it occurred opportunely to Grigas that a person who has died an unnatural death must be left just as he was found until the authorities have made their inspection. And so they left him.

2

Miks Bumbullis was soon found. He had been making the round of the taverns, shouting drunkenly to any one who would listen that he had been bagged by the gamekeeper. That meant a couple of years in the pen. But of the murder he knew nothing. He put out his tongue at the gendarme who handcuffed him, and insisted that the tavern-keeper help

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himself to the money in his pocket to pay for the drinks. He had to be careful, he explained, of the expensive wrist-bands the State had just given him. Miks was a strapping, square-built fellow with a fair, innocent face. He looked out upon the world through wide pop-eyes and wore his hair parted smoothly on the side,—a fashion reminiscent of his days of military service.

His first hearing took quite a different turn to that anticipated by the examining magistrate. The old gamekeeper had long been after him. And in the forest, where it was man against man, Miks would certainly have taken a shot at him. Honor would have demanded that. But somebody else did the shooting through the window.

So far so good. But where was he on the night of the murder?

Now came the unexpected turn in the situation. He had broken in somewhere to get himself a shot-gun. Where, he would not say.

What was he going to do with the gun? He must have known that if he was seen with it he would be arrested on the spot.

He had intended to cross the border; and when you cross the border it is always well to go armed.

The examining magistrate warned him that if he refused to tell where he had broken in he might consider his head as good as gone. But even to that he said nothing. That same day he was manacled between two policemen and driven off in the patrol-

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wagon two miles away to the prison. The people of Heydekrug lined the road to stare at him as he went by. He seemed to take that as a great joke.

Grigas and Eva received the representatives of the law with the ready dignity of an easy conscience, which changed into intense embarrassment when questions were asked concerning the details of their home-coming in the early morning. The situation was clear. The breaking of the pane was plainly due to shotgun fire, although there was only one wound, and that above the heart. The corpse was held for further examination. No footprints were found.

When Miks Bumbullis was led before the body a half dozen pairs of eyes turned in curiosity upon his face. The blank stare which has wrung from the soul so many confessions was without effect upon him. Calmly, almost with curiosity, Miks looked at the corpse and then glanced around as if searching for something in the room. The customary remonstrances, which the interpreter—a small, clever man who was accustomed to reading the minds of foreigners—translated with even more than their original fervor, fell on unheeding ears. "Don't know anything about it," was the only response. Not until little Anikka was brought in crying did a sudden expression of weariness flit over the tense features. But only for an instant. Then he became the old Miks again.

Of course the child could not be made to speak before strangers. Eva spoke for her, and repeated

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what she had babbled when first questioned. Because Eva was not there, the child had been frightened and unable to sleep. She had cried and cried. Then her grandfather had come and taken her from her crib. He was holding her in his lap when there was a sudden report outside. Her grandfather jumped up, then lay down on the floor and went to sleep. And then she fell asleep too.

The examining magistrate turned to Miks. "When you aimed at the gamekeeper, and saw the child sitting in his lap, didn't it occur to you that you might shoot an innocent child instead of the old man?"

"Don't know anything about it," was all they got out of Miks. But something like a sob or a gulp was in his voice. And when the child was taken away, he followed her with the hungry eyes of a dog staring at a sausage.

The next day Miks surrendered to the extent of confessing where he had broken in on Midsummer Night. Strange to tell, he had sought out the house of the young widow who had been after him for a year and a half. He had heard that her late husband had owned a shotgun, and it was that he was after. But there was none to be found. To the question, how he happened to know the house well enough to expect to succeed in his robbery, he responded by a guilty silence.

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3

Then the widow, Aluta Lampsatis, was called. She was a pretty woman of thirty, with wide free hips and a prominent, carefully laced bosom. In her full, high-colored face moved a pair of restless, lustful eyes, and under her kerchief, which was thrown back from her face, gleamed a kind of large buckle, although the rich, red-blond hair required no ornament. In halting German, yet with great aplomb, she assured them that she was a respectable woman of property against whom nothing could be said by anybody. That was not the point, the magistrate told her. She had only to testify whether on Midsummer Night or soon thereafter she had noticed that her house had been broken into. But she insisted that she was a respectable woman of property against whom nothing could be said by anybody.

The magistrate was thus forced to call in the interpreter, who rebuked her in her mother tongue with such eloquence that she lost all desire for evasion. She herself, she said, had been asleep. But her niece, Madlyna, who was on her way home from the Midsummer Night celebration, had seen a man step from the window of the lumber room and disappear in the direction of the forest. The magistrate and the interpreter exchanged glances. Now they had the explanation of the widow's attempt to evade the question. Fortunately, Aluta's niece had come with her. She came forward, and proved to be an

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eighteen-year-old doll with limpid eyes and a mouth like a cherry. She was in her Sunday clothes and wore a green silk apron over the homespun *margina*, with snow-white sleeves which flowed from the lavishly embroidered bodice. She looked like a peasant maid in an operetta. It was not difficult to deal with her for she spoke excellent German, gave clear brief answers, and could be sworn in on the spot.

Like Grigas and Eva, she had come home towards morning from the Midsummer Night celebration.

"Alone?"

Modestly, she lowered the long lashes of her eyes. "All alone." In the distance she had heard the dog barking, and at the sound had hidden behind the fence. And then, unmistakably, she had seen a man step through the window of the "little room."

"I believe the man came out of the lumber room," the magistrate remarked. In old-fashioned houses the lumber room, the room in which provisions are kept, is usually under a separate roof.

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" declared Madlyna positively. And the very eagerness of the denial brought blood into the wax-doll's face. "He came right out of the 'little room.' To that I can swear."

"And where does your aunt sleep, Madlyna?"

"She sleeps in the 'big room'; to that I can swear."

The "big" and "little" rooms in these houses are always on the same side of the vestibule and have a communicating door between them. The magistrate

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and the interpreter again smiled knowingly at each other.

Madlyna was dismissed and Aluta was again summoned. After the magistrate, with the help of the interpreter, had described the serious consequences of perjury, he informed her of the contradiction between Madlyna's testimony and the story her aunt claimed to have heard from her. Once more Aluta declared that she was a respectable woman of property against whom nothing could be said by anybody. Thereupon she was again exposed to the eloquence of the interpreter, who enumerated for her one after the other all the torments of hell. The magistrate feared that Madlyna might break down if he confronted the two women with one another. Therefore he confined himself to trying to find a motive for the alleged robbery.

Did she have a shotgun in the house?

Vehemently she denied that she had.

Had she had one in the house?

That was not true, either. While her husband was alive there had been a fowling piece in the house, which her lamented husband had used to bring down young crows. But when she became ill she sold it to the Jew.

"To what Jew?"

Naturally, she did not know. "A Jew is a Jew. They all look alike."

The magistrate, having carefully avoided touching

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upon the real point at issue, now thought the time had come to introduce the name of the accused.

Did she know Miks Bumbullis?

She was not in the least confused. Not even embarrassed. Why shouldn't she know Miks Bumbullis? He and her dear late husband used always to cross the border together.

The interpreter looked significantly at the magistrate. Everybody smuggled in these frontier villages, and they all went armed for the occasion. Miks might well have remembered the shotgun his old companion used to carry. If he knew nothing of its sale, he might assume with good reason that it was lying about unused.

Had Miks Bumbullis been in her house before?

Why, yes. He had often called evenings for her dear husband.

"Called for him? Why?"

Well, to go across the border.

Did she know where her late husband kept his gun?

She was startled and grew reflective, as though scenting the secret linking of the questions which followed one another in apparently aimless fashion. Then she began to wail and return to her old defense of the respectable woman of property. From this moment nothing more could be got out of her, and she was not even sworn in.

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The case came up for trial by jury at the next Assizes. A great troop of witnesses had been called. The murdered gamekeeper emerged from the testimony a very severe prosecutor, to whom it had never occurred to spare even occasional harmless poachers, and who had made many enemies. Among other facts, for example, it developed quite casually that the late husband of Aluta Lampsatis had himself been jailed through the gamekeeper's efforts. Apparently, he had not bought the gun merely to shoot young crows. At all events, it was impossible to overlook the probability that if Miks could produce an acceptable alibi, suspicion might as easily fall upon some one else as upon him. Dressed in his Sunday clothes, Miks sat silent, often indifferent, on the prisoners' bench. Not in his still ruddy face, but in his wan fixed eyes, was reflected the mental weariness which comes over children of nature, unaccustomed to thinking, when they see their fate hanging in the balance upon the rise and fall of the testimony of witnesses. To-day, Aluta wore no buckle under her kerchief. Once again she was all injured impatience. And Madlyna's swaying provocativeness brought a complacent smirk to the faces of even the greybeards in the jury box.

Once more the testimony of the two women failed to agree. Aluta remembered in the most positive way that on the morning after the robbery her niece had

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told her she had seen a man come out of the lumber room. And Madlyna insisted that she could not have said that, for it would not have been true.

Miks Bumbullis himself described the path he had taken. He had opened the unlocked door of the house, had gone gropingly into the big room.

But Aluta slept in the big room! She must have heard him and waked up.

Well, she did not wake up. He had crept forward into the little room, run his hands over the walls and into the corners, and finally, when the gun was nowhere to be found, had climbed out through the window.

Why hadn't he taken the easier way back through the big room and the hall?

Aluta had stirred in her bed.

Up to a certain point this sounded plausible enough; and it agreed entirely with Madlyna's story. But the discrepancy between what she was said to have told her aunt, and her sworn testimony, was still unbridged. Moreover, the marriage broker was on hand to testify that at Aluta's behest he had gone twice to Miks to ask him in marriage. Whatever might be the truth, this time Aluta had to be sworn in. Again she was expressly warned. She had already raised her hand to take the oath when the unexpected happened. Miks interrupted the ceremony and began to speak. The judge called him to order, but he went on talking. Like heavy drops, the Lithuanian words fell from his lips. Aluta heard

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him in silence, then suddenly broke down and began to cry.

What he said was interpreted thus: "I have sworn by God and your husband not to say anything even in court, but it is better for you that you do not burden your soul with perjury and bring me to the scaffold. So tell the whole truth." And now, after much wailing and wringing of hands, what had actually happened was to come to light.

Aluta was lying at night half asleep in her bed. She was suddenly startled by the sound of a man's footsteps approaching from the vestibule. She knew it would do no good to cry out, for Madlyna and the servants had all gone to the Midsummer Night celebration. So she began to pray, awaiting the end. But suddenly she heard her name, and recognized Miks's voice. "Go away," she said; "even though I did send for you, I am a respectable woman of property against whom nothing can be said by anybody." Miks had answered, "I am not going to get into your bed. I only want you to give me the gun your husband used to own, because the gamekeeper has taken mine away." She had replied, "The gun is no longer here; and if it were I wouldn't give it to you. You want it only to kill the gamekeeper with." This he denied, but she did not believe him. Then, when he started on his way, she sprang in her anxiety out of bed and blocked his path. He put his arms about her as she stood there in her night dress, and he stayed with her until morning.

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The great gap was bridged at last. Miks's innocence seemed established. Even the question why, since he was there with the knowledge of the owner of the house, he had climbed out through the window instead of going simply through the door,—even this, after some hemming and hawing, was adequately explained. They had thought that Madlyna had come home in the meantime, and, since her room was on the other side of the house, a man's footsteps in the vestibule would have been heard by her.

"You might have said all this to begin with," the presiding judge opined. And since all the witnesses had now given testimony, the prosecutor began his speech. Thereafter everything went forward smoothly until sentence was pronounced. Miks Bumbullis was acquitted of murder and was condemned to two years' imprisonment for poaching.

Not a muscle moved in Miks's face. Even when Aluta, who had meanwhile recovered from her convulsive weeping, went over and congratulated him, he did not smile. His motionless gaze was fixed upon the witness' bench where, beside Eva, little Anikka sat torn and dirty, gnawing an apple which one of the village women had given her. For the sake of completeness, she had been called also, and Eva had spoken for her. When Miks was about to be taken away—for naturally there was no question of bail—he turned once again towards the child as though wishing to say something to her. But the bailiff thrust him from the room.

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5

The old gamekeeper's grave was grown with weeds, for there was no one to keep his memory fresh. About the person of little Anikka a lawsuit had arisen between the Forestry Department and the community to which her vanished father had belonged. Each wished to lay upon the other the charge of bringing up the child. Since the Department was not overburdened with sentiment, and the distant relationship between the deceased and his orphaned ward was an adequate argument, the child had remained a dependent and unwelcome guest in the village which, for its part, was glad to be able to transfer her for a small fee to the place where she had most recently been sheltered. And so it happened that one day she was publicly offered at the town hall and went to him who would take her in return for the smallest sum—a cottager named Kibelka, an untrustworthy lout who spent on brandy the two coppers so earned.

No one has ever known or described, no one will ever be able to know or describe, the suffering and the dumb misery of a poor little creature from whom both God and man have turned away their pitying eyes. Only darkness and silence know what it is that is stifled and corroded in the still slumbering soul by hunger and dirt, brutality and cold, and most of all by the lack of a tender word. No one can tell, until out of the shyly tremulous, scarcely breath-

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ing, deeply hidden, half alive being, an innocently trusting and exultant young life is born. Every year an unnumbered host of these human derelicts is shoveled into the grave; and that is where they are happiest. It is only by a miracle that occasionally a hand is thrust down from the sun to draw up one or another of these agonizing creatures into the light. But supposing there were no sun? Supposing there were not even a watchdog to be kind to one?

To lie next the dog, and like him to be warmed gently by the agreeable afternoon sun, was after all the only luck of so luckless a shadow of a being. . . . Suddenly the watchdog pricked up his ears, leapt up barking, and swept his heavy chain around the circle of his prescribed kingdom.

Anikka, who was alone at home, saw a man come through the gate. First he looked round cautiously, and then he came forward to the kennel to which she was clinging for safety. He stopped before the dog's bared teeth, and asked, "Is the master at home?"

Anikka knew they were all digging potatoes in the field, but nothing in the world could have made her answer.

"What is your name?" he went on.

In her fright she had forgotten her name. Meanwhile, the dog was yelping, and not until the stranger had beaten him with his stick did he draw back, whimpering against the kennel. Then the stranger came closer to her, still holding out the stick, into which the dog sank his teeth. Anikka realized that in a

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moment she would be kidnaped, and she began to cry very hard. Then she felt herself seized by the arm and pulled abruptly forward, while the dog, struck once again with the stick, was sent rolling on the ground.

"Don't cry, don't cry. I shan't hurt you," she heard his voice. She could not see through her tears. But there was something in his voice to which she was not accustomed, and she stopped crying.

"Are you Anikka?"

"Ye-es."

"Would you like a licorice stick?"

She did want a licorice stick. That was what the other children sometimes ate when school was out; but of course they had never given any to her. The stranger gave her one out of a paper sack, a beautiful one into which she bit at once, for now she no longer feared him. She even dared look at him. He did not look wicked. Much better than the master. And he did not reek of brandy, either. He had sand-colored hair and a mustache. She knew now where she had seen him before. In a big room, like a church. But instead of a preacher in his robe, there had been a whole tableful of men.

"How old are you, Anikka?"

"Going on seven."

"Do you go to school?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I have nothing to wear, the woman says."

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Looking down at her he stared a long time at the rags in which she was scantily clothed. Then he asked her where he might find the master. She pointed towards the fields, and went part way with him, for now she wanted never to leave him. When he saw the others at work he gave her the paper sack which was still in his hand, and said, "Hide it so that they won't eat it all up."

With that he sent her back and went down the potato furrow until he came upon the master of the house who, with his wife and three children, was on his knees digging potatoes. Each of them was groaning and swearing after his fashion.

Kibelka recognized him at once. Shaking the earth from his clothes he stood up and held out his hand. Even though he was not the murderer, he might have been, and it was well to stand in favorably with him. "Of course you had an easy time of it," he said; "for any man who is fed by the State is well cared for." And he laughed in a way that was at once a sneer and a wink of complicity, while his black, stubbled mouth stretched wide between his ears.

"You are that much worse off here," said Miks Bumbullis, glancing at the still undug potato patch with its sparse growth.

The wife stood up and wiped her hands on her gunny-sack apron. She looked like a withered yellow goat with sharp hard eyes. Her three brats stood by, gaping. Together, the two Kibelkas then began a song of woe. A wet September; everything rot-

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ting already; hired help so dear, and the rest of it.

"If you're looking for cheap help, I know some one," said Miks.

"Who would be fool enough," laughed Kibelka; "even the hangman sees that he gets paid."

"I've saved a little money," Miks said; "and if I'm given a free hand, I might bring things home from time to time."

They looked at each other for a moment and then jumped eagerly at his offer, and no further questions were asked. And so Miks Bumbullis became hired man to little Anikka's guardian.

In the beginning he seemed to pay very little attention to her. Three days went by before he inquired who the insect was that was always crawling about the house. The Kibelkas were somewhat loath to talk, for in their bones they still believed he had committed the murder. But they told him finally how they had come by the child and swore that it was only Christian charity that induced them to keep it in their house. He listened to their story with indifference, saying only, "Her father is said to be in America. When he comes back rich he will reward those who have been good to the child." That gave the Kibelkas something to think about. At noon on the following day the small wan ragamuffin, who heretofore had always stood looking on dumbly from the chimney corner, was allowed to sit at table with the other children.

When Saturday evening came, Miks Bumbullis

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disappeared. He was back on Sunday morning with a rusty gun, plastered inside and out with clay. The Kibelkas did not ask where he had got it. They all stood round and looked respectfully on while he removed the parts with a screwdriver and cleaned and oiled each part until the gun shone bright as a new thaler and ready for use. The next Sunday the Kibelkas had venison for dinner—something which never in the world had happened to them before. They ate like gluttons, and even the watchdog had his bone. Little Anikka sat at table in a new red dress which Miks had bought her. The other children caressed her enviously while she marveled and wondered how it had all come about.

"I see what you are up to," said Kibelka. "But suppose her father doesn't come back from America. You've put yourself out for nothing."

"Then I'll do it to please the Lord," Miks answered. "A man ought to have something like that in mind, you know."

Kibelka laughed flatteringly and proposed a toast to his hired man. Brandy was making him more and more friendly.

"You ought to send her to school, you know," said Miks as if giving voice to an afterthought. Thereupon Kibelka's wife began to complain as usual. The inspector had called twice already about it, and the thought that in the end they might have to pay a fine had kept her awake at night. Henceforth, such fears were superfluous. On Monday next, when

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Anikka was ready to set out for school with the other children, she even found a slate lying on her cot.

6

Winter came. Miks Bumbullis was now highly respected in the house. He curried the horse until it shone; he fattened the cow; and when the flails hissed in the grain his stroke was always to be heard above the others. He asked for no wages, nor indeed could he have got any, for Kibelka drank up every copper. This was why no one looked askance when, early in the morning or at dusk, Miks occasionally disappeared behind the barn and took his time about coming back. He bought clothes for the three brats, so that now they looked as well as Anikka. He even brought home with him a fine-toothed comb which did service for them all. Kibelka thought it outrageous that the comb should be used on his children, but in the end he borrowed it himself.

Anikka lived in a dream. A warm schoolhouse, good food, and hardly any blows at all! Now and then she got smacked, but she scarcely felt it because she knew in her heart that there was some one who would protect her from anything worse. She followed Miks about like a puppy; but she never dared go close to him for he did not encourage it. At mealtime her gaze was always fixed upon his face. And when, later, she was taught the story of our Lord, she knew at once who it was He looked like.

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One evening, while the pine logs crackled in the fireplace, Miks was specially gay. He said to Jons, the eldest, "Want a ride?" Of course he did. So Miks took him upon his knee and sang "Humpty Dumpty." Then came Katrika's turn, and then Jendrys's. Meanwhile, Anikka stood in a corner and thought, as she held back her tears, "He won't do it to me; I'm just an orphan." But soon he said, "Anikka must have a ride, too."

She was very shy and came towards him quite slowly. Then, when he raised her high in the air, it seemed to her she was flying in the clouds. She rode so long that she became quite dizzy, and Jons, who was jealous, cried again and again, "I want to ride as long as that!"

These moments were the most beautiful she had ever known, for she had quite forgotten having been held in any one else's lap. She remembered only a long white beard, and she thought that must have been Santa Claus, about whom her teacher had told her.

Meanwhile, it had grown very cold. Running against a snowstorm to the distant schoolhouse made tears come to one's eyes. But kind Miks had bought her mittens and a wool-lined cap with ear flaps which fastened snugly under her chin. The three Kibelka children had them too, so there was no cause for envy. But Kibelka's sharp-eyed wife knew what was what. She said one day with a bitter-sweet smile,

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"My children are lucky to have you about. But the Lord only knows what you are hiding from us."

Miks answered, "Is being fond of children something to hide?" and he wandered away.

Anikka did not sleep with the other children in their well-heated room. She slept on the other side of the hall where it was now fearfully cold. This was a lapse carried over from the days of her neglect; but she would not have had it otherwise, for in the room next hers slept Miks. Still, now that the winter cold had come she was unable to sleep. She would lie beneath the coarse horse blanket, shivering with cold, and sometimes half awake until morning. Lying there one night, she heard a low groan from the adjoining room. It sounded as if some one were in great sorrow and knew not where to turn. Summoning all her courage in the fearful cold of the night, she threw off her blanket and went into Miks's room. She was shivering even more with fear than with cold as she asked, "Miks, are you ill?" Out of the darkness came something like a cry of joy. Two arms were round her in which she soon lay still and happy and fast asleep. Thereafter, she crept into his room every night, and slept as though in Abraham's bosom.

Mornings he would waken her early enough so that no one knew of it. During the day, he paid her no more heed than before; but she no longer grieved, for she knew now how much he loved her. Never

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afterwards did she hear him groan, and often he would fall asleep before she did.

7

One evening towards Christmas, as Miks Bumbullis was on one of his customary expeditions into the wood, he heard his name called by a woman who was sitting in the snow on the edge of the ditch, muffled up to the eyes. He jumped as if shot, for he had recognized the voice at once.

"I am glad you came, Aluta Lampsatis," he said; "for I have been intending to go to see you."

"You've been three months making up your mind to do it," she answered; "and if I hadn't waylaid you, you would have let another three go by in the same way."

"That is very likely," he admitted. "One keeps putting off what one doesn't enjoy doing."

"You dare say that to my face!" she cried, her teeth clenched and her eyes flashing.

"It's nothing but the truth," he said.

"I'll tell you a truth or two myself," she shouted. "You shot the gamekeeper. You did it with that gun, there, which is my gun. And my soul is everlastingly damned, and Madlyna's soul too,—Madlyna, who is my sister's daughter and was glad to swear to whatever I asked her. There's a bit of truth for you."

"That may be true," said Miks; "but it is also true

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that you put the gun into my hand and said, 'My husband was going to do it, but he died before he got the chance. Now you do it, or you don't know what honor is.' That is the truth, too."

"And what is more," she went on, even before he had done speaking, "for a day and a night I thought and thought how I could save you from the death penalty. If I had merely said, 'He was with me at the time,' no one would have believed me. And so I coached Madlyna to say she had seen you climbing out of the room, while I denied everything. For the same reason, I made you repeat over and over again, at least ten times, what you were to say when I started to take the oath. For you are as stupid as a German."

"And you are as clever as the devil," he agreed.

"It's a good thing," she said, "that no one can hear us except the crows, or the three of us would suffer for it. What things people say when they get angry! So, for the first and last time I ask you: will you keep your promise?"

"I know of no promise," he groaned.

"Of course you know of no promise. But I know that for two years people have been pointing fingers at me, and that no marriage broker has come to my house, either for me or for Madlyna. And since Michaelmas I haven't met a soul who hasn't asked me if I knew who was playing at hired man at Kibelka's in Wiszellen. And so I ask you for the very last time: when will you send some one to arrange our marriage?"

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"Let me have until Shrove Tuesday," he pleaded.

"Yes," she sneered. "First until Shrove Tuesday, and then until Palm Sunday, and so on until never. Well, so be it. I'll wait until Shrove Tuesday. And if nobody comes by then, I shall know what to do about it."

What he stammered in reply sounded almost like gratitude. She was already on her way when she turned again and said, "People say you are keeping that child at Kibelka's like a princess. You had better stop it. You can't shrive your soul that way, and the police will think twice about it if they hear of it." And with that she was gone.

Miks Bumbullis was as stunned by it all as if he had been hit on the head with an ax. For a time he stood quite still. Then he walked unsteadily into the forest. But he shot nothing, nor did he see anything. He spent the time thinking over and over again, "Until to-day I was happy without knowing it." Suddenly a great desire to be with the child came over him. He uncocked his gun and ran as quickly as he could back to the house.

Lying on his cold cot he heard the light footsteps groping nearer. A pale little face thrust itself into the curve of his arm, and once again he was in Paradise. He began to weep bitterly, as men weep usually only in church. The child cried too, without knowing why. He comforted her, and she caressed him. And it was almost as if he had not cried at all.

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8

Shrove Tuesday was near. But he could not make up his mind to take the step. He was ashamed at the thought of sending a marriage broker, as the custom was. Everybody knew how matters stood, and for that very reason, he would have to do the thing himself. When one Sunday came he would say to himself, "Next Sunday." But next Sunday never came. He did not go to church, for he might meet her there. Good Friday came. He was sitting in his room carving a toy for Anikka when the eldest Kibelka child, Jons, rushed in and said, "There is some one outside to see you: a grand lady."

He put aside his work with misgivings and went out. There beyond the fence, wearing a new white headdress and a silk apron, stood Madlyna. Her stockings were thin and white, although it was still quite cold, and she seemed all soft and flowing curves. Smiling at him in friendly fashion, she asked if he would take a little stroll with her.

"I don't want to, but I have to," he said.

They went together into the wood where three months before he had met Aluta. Neither spoke.

Finally Madlyna began. "You probably wonder why I haven't yet got married," she said. "I can have as many husbands as I want, but I want none of them."

"Your aunt says that nobody comes to court you," he said; "and I am supposed to be to blame."

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"Perhaps you are to blame," she answered, smiling. "But not in the way you think. When you are master of the house, you will have to feed me, too."

"I don't want to be master in your house," he said.

"Man's will usually doesn't count for much," she said. "And if you'll take a bit of good advice, you won't wait any longer. My aunt talks a good deal. One of these days it may be too late."

"If she gave me away she'd be giving herself away at the same time," he retorted.

"And me too," said Madlyna, still smiling easily. "But since Shrove Tuesday the very devil has been in her. She does nothing but talk of the child that was sitting in the gamekeeper's lap at the time of the accident, and is now sitting in your lap. And she asks how that is to be explained. No one knows, of course; but every one looks wise."

With sudden clarity he saw where this rash talk would lead. He saw the end in sight. Aluta Lampsatis was ordinarily a clever woman; but now, in her insane spite, she was digging his grave and her own as well.

"I shall get off easiest," said Madlyna with the same sweet and modest smile, as if she were talking of flowers and birds, rather than of jail or worse. "For I am still very young and was forced into it. But I am sorry for you, Miks. And so I think you had better not let another day pass without coming to the house. You ought to come this very afternoon. After that she will leave you in peace."

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"I'll go there to live," he said, "only on one condition: that Aluta is kind to the child."

"You want to take her with you!" Madlyna asked. For the first time her smile was gone, replaced by a look of amazement.

"Yes," he said almost solemnly; "I want to take her with me. Otherwise I shall never, never come."

She leaned against a tree trunk and looked silently upward. Her limpid eyes were as blue as the sky at Eastertide. Then she said, "For the time being, she hates the child, because she thinks you love it more than you do her. But if you do as she wishes, and remove the stain from her name, she will be reconciled to the child. Besides, I shall still be there, and I am very fond of children."

"You will get married and leave," he argued morosely.

"When did you see the fern put forth flowers, that you have suddenly grown so wise?" she asked, looking up mockingly into his face.

In that moment his own fate and the child's no longer seemed threatened. "All right," he said; "I'll go."

9

And so, on Ascension Day, Miks Bumbullis and Aluta Lampsatis sat in the bridal corner surrounded by their wedding guests in bright costumes. The table was heaped with delectable food, and from the ceiling hung an artificial wreath in which silver birds

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were swinging. The guests of honor were presented with richly embroidered kerchiefs and inscribed scrolls as mementoes of the occasion. As usual, there was a glass filled with beer into which the wedding guests tossed their gifts in coin, the beer preventing each from knowing how much his neighbor had given. But this unwelcome glass made the rounds so rapidly that most of the guests were unable to rid themselves of their coins. The natural result was a feeling of good will which covered the past with the generous mantle of charity.

The Kibelkas had been invited, and the good man had long since been lying in a peaceful stupor behind the barn. They had, however, not been allowed to bring Anikka with them. Aluta had decreed it thus. And thereby she proved herself again the cleverest of them all. For if the waif had been allowed to wander among the guests like a child of the house, surprise and suspicion would have begun instantly to turn idle gossip into grave harm. But when the bridal supper had been served, Aluta's brandy, sweetened with cherry-juice and honey, loosened the tongues of the guests and the banter of the women grew more and more bold. It did not spare even the poor child who only yesterday had been a stumbling block in the household.

"Usually," said one of the housewives, "it is a widow who brings something living to the marriage. This time it is the bridegroom, although he is still only a bachelor."

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Another said, "You won't have to do a thing, you two. Children fly down to you from heaven."

And a third spoke up. "Buy her from the Kibelkas. For a bottle of brandy he'll throw in the other three."

Aluta, who was wearing her red-blond hair in dignified fashion close under her headdress, and on whose breast there shone a brooch of gold as large as a queen's, listened to the chatter with an indulgent smile. Then she said thoughtfully, "There is something in that, you know. I intended to suggest it myself to my husband; but I don't believe he would allow it, for it would look so strange."

Exclamations of dissent broke forth, this time unmalicious and quite sincere. What harm was there in it? Especially "if he was really fond of the child." One particularly eager woman offered to go at once to fetch Anikka from Wiszellen to the wedding feast.

Miks Bumbullis' heart thumped violently. He sat in silence, waiting, filled with anxious joy. But Aluta calmly dismissed the suggestion. There would be time enough later, she said. Meanwhile, no one was going to miss any of the feast on her account.

Madlyna, who went among the guests as mistress of ceremonies, and whose quick, dainty movements and flowing costumes inspired the village boys to call her *melonoyi kielele*, "little wagtail"—Madlyna stood listening while they talked of the child in the bridal corner. Now she said with a laugh, "If you

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all insist upon it, I shall be the first to earn the gratitude of our hostess. And I'll do it to-morrow."

Aluta cast her a look in which there was not much gratitude. But Madlyna had moved away and was offering cheerful resistance to three youths who had left their girls unceremoniously in order to wrestle a bit with her.

The next day there still remained some of the excitement of the wedding feast, and it lingered on until the end of the third day. When at length everything had subsided and the newly married pair were allowed to be alone, Madlyna set out for Wiszellen. She came back two hours later with Anikka, who was wearing a new green-embroidered bodice and staring with great yearning eyes at her future home. Behind them trudged twelve-year-old Jons with a bundle in which all the possessions of the orphan were wrapped. When they came within sight of the place he took Anikka's shoes and stockings out of the bundle so that she might not go into the house in her bare feet.

It was as if a little princess were making her entrance. Under the elm before the door the bridal pair sat sipping milk thickened with sugar, for vespers had rung and it was the hour of rest. Anikka let drop Madlyna's hand and began to run towards Miks. But she saw a pair of eyes whose gaze made her pause. She knew no longer whether to go forward or backward. But then gayly laughing Madlyna came forward and said, "Why are you afraid of

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your foster mother, my little lamb? She has promised not to hurt you." Anikka dropped a pretty curtsey, as she had been taught in school to do. Then she waited for a welcome.

Were she now alive, she would still be waiting.

10

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that Anikka had a hard time of it. Aluta was much too clever not to know that any conspicuous display of her antipathy would unfailingly lose her the good will of her husband. Therefore, she acted as though she suffered the child for its own sake not unwillingly. In this way she was repaid doubly for each crumb of kindness she let fall.

Miks Bumbullis was a careful master and a faithful steward. He worked from early until late, and thought of everything. The potatoes thrived, the hay was stacked while it was dry, and his scythe never tired at the barley harvest. A great change had come over his nature. He no longer frequented the pothouses, and he came home sober even from the weekly market. He had given up poaching; and when the others tried to tempt him across the border, he would answer that his wife did not wish him to go.

That was not the truth, however. On the contrary, what had first made him attractive to Aluta was his loose, refractory conduct. She had thought that in him she would win the most passionate and

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vigorous of men. And she was bitterly disappointed to see him clinging to her side like any respectable landowner.

As a matter of fact, she was not allowed to know that he could still joke and be merry, for it came out only when he was alone with the child. At such times they would play all the games that only two people can play, and every day he would think up new ones. There was a game called *Cat's Snare* in which one of the players has to creep through the arched arms of the other. And because he was of course much too broad to crawl through her childish arms, there was no end of laughter. Another game was called *The Windmill.* One of you tied two hop-poles crosswise on his body and turned very fast round and round. If the other could grasp one of the poles, and so bring the mill to a halt, he had won. And thus they would play often until long after dusk. But not in the farmyard; far beyond, where their laughter could not be heard. For they always felt that this would not be appreciated.

They were not afraid to play before Madlyna. In fact, she might have been the third member of their conspiracy, and things would have been very gay indeed. But evenings, Madlyna was generally busy somewhere else. Behind the garden fence, youths lay in wait for her, and there was a perpetual crowing and clucking around her. When, however, it came to the point of marriage, and a broker called at the house, he had to march right out again. He

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could scarcely finish his glass of cherry brandy, Madlyna would laugh so at him. Aluta would reproach her violently, but without the slightest effect.

"What do you want of me?" Madlyna would ask. "Don't I work as hard as any servant? And since there is something of my mother in the house still, it is as if I were working for myself." There could be no argument here, for it was the truth.

Since the wedding, Madlyna had slept in the wing of the house where the lumber room was. She thought the young couple would prefer to be alone. But because the boys of the village gave her no peace there mornings, and because the dog barked unceasingly, she had moved back into the room on the other side of the vestibule. Miks envied her, for in the room adjoining slept the child. He took it that the village boys followed Madlyna there, and was worried lest Anikka waken when one of the favorites went into the room. True, he had never caught anybody going in, but it was a reasonable thing to assume. Madlyna was of so affectionate a nature that she could not refrain now and then from giving even himself proof of her tenderness. There was never anything crude or bold in her action; like her whole being, whatever she did was of a careful and exquisite delicacy, so that you could not help being charmed by what she did, even if you disapproved of it. Her smile and her presence became gradually one enveloping caress, which was the more delicious for the fact that one was not constrained to take it

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seriously. The very gayety which surrounded her grace was sufficient to dispel all thought of a possible amorous intrigue.

Then one day when Miks approached unobserved, he heard her singing a Lithuanian *daina* which went something like this:

When one of my lambs
Falls into the river,
I do not wait long
Before rescuing it.
Oh, no! I rush in at once.

But now my love lies
In the arms of a wicked aunt,
And I ask every day
How I can save him,
But I cannot think how.

Shall I scorn the love
Of that wicked woman
Who stirs poisonous herbs
In the cup he drinks,
And wrangles and keeps him from sleep?

Or shall I say,
"Come, my beloved.
In my little room
There is a bed,
Oh, how narrow a bed!

"But to the wall,
The icy cold wall

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I will quickly turn,
That you may be warm
With me in your arms, and sleep."

Shall I speak to him thus;
Or must I be still
Till from that woman's couch
Grief and despair
Lead him down to the river?

Though even a thousand
Lambs I have saved,
Him whom I loved
I saw destroyed.
Him I did not save.

Miks slipped softly away. He did not want her to know that she had been overheard by him. And when he saw her later, and looked at her laughing untroubled face, he found it inconceivable that it was she who had sung a song so darkly passionate.

And another time, holding Anikka in her lap, she sang this song:

Baby, my baby, if you were mine,
I'd give you trinkets and clothes so fine.

I would give you a bed of softest down,
I would give you God and His starry crown.

A sweetheart too I'd find who would
Go to the church as a lover should.

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But what, my child, do you give me?
Alone I lie, as cold as can be;

And he who loves you as his life
Looks not at me, nor leaves his wife.

If he'd but come to me the night long,
Then baby, baby, to me you would belong.

From that time on, Miks began to wonder whether he might not take her in his arms. But he drove away the temptation, for when he thought of the many young men who had knocked at her door, it seemed to him unworthy that he should become a *kuszbendris*, one who shares a woman. And then there was the child. For her sake he did not wish to fill the house with suspicion and discord.

But dissension came notwithstanding.

When the weather grew cold, Madlyna crossed with the child from the other side of the house into the well-heated little room whose door, without lock or latch, was always slightly ajar. Miks had grown ashamed to lie beside his wife. He made all manner of excuses in order to be left to himself. Finally, since there was nothing else to do, he began again the life he had led before the great catastrophe; for only in this way could he turn night into day.

He sought out the taverns which served as smuggling bases, and as there was not always booty to be carried across the border, he carried his gun with him on the chance that he might bring down a roebuck

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in the early morning light. It was inevitable that he should again come into bad repute. Aluta, who had once for this reason bestowed her affections upon him, and who had so recently called him contemptuously a coward, now scolded vehemently and complained that her respectable house was being turned into a thieves' kitchen. But he paid no attention to her.

One day Madlyna took him aside and said, "It is not good for you to be away so much, Miks. You ought to stay at home more."

"Why do you want me to stay home?" he asked.

"Look at the child," she replied, and walked away.

He was alarmed. He had taken it for granted that everything was right with Anikka. During the day she was at school. Madlyna slept with her at night. His wife, moreover, had not yet done anything malevolent. At the most, she paid little or no attention to the child.

However, now that he had Anikka before him he realized that she had no longer been coming freely to him. Until he called her, she would hide timidly in a corner. And she seemed pale and delicate, though she had blossomed like a flower during the summer. He tried to question her, but she would not talk. She could only weep bitterly.

He watched carefully, and one evening he saw Aluta strike the child with a leather bridle studded with brass knobs. Rushing forth from his hiding-place he tore off the poor child's clothing and found the little body covered with stripes and blue welts.

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Then he raised the bridle which the enraged woman had thrown from her, and beat Aluta until she lay writhing and whimpering on the ground. In his anger he turned against even Madlyna. Thereafter, the devil seemed to live in that house.

Madlyna's song will come true, he would often say to himself when despair drove him from the house at night.

II

One November morning just before dawn, as he sat chilled in the fresh snow, waiting to take aim at a beautiful buck, he happened to turn his head. There was the muzzle of a gun pointed at him. Behind the gun he saw a hat with the green band he knew so well. It was too late for him to raise his own gun to his cheek. Instead, he got up slowly to his feet and said, "How many years will this cost me?"

"Not half as many as you have cost me nights, Miks," answered the broad-shouldered guard, who was the murdered gamekeeper's successor. And he added, "Leave your gun there. I'll get it later. You might take it away from me, and mine with it."

"I am not as bad as people make out," Miks smiled; and without more ado he took the path which was to lead him to the police. Some ten steps behind him, holding his gun in readiness, walked the gamekeeper.

"Now don't turn round," he said in friendly fash-

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ion as Miks was about to speak. "If you try, you'll get a bullet in the neck."

And so Miks had a half hour in which to ponder what had happened. To be rid of Aluta was a blessing. But suddenly his heart sank. The child! What was to become of the child! "I am a fool," he reproached himself. "If only because of her, I shouldn't have done it." He began to fashion a thousand schemes for finding another refuge for Anikka. But he dismissed them all. If he was to draw the attention of the authorities again upon the child, and if objections were to arise again when he was examined, the artificial framework which Aluta had built up would fall in like a sheaf of oats.

As they walked on they met people who, half in sympathy and half in malice, joined the procession. The gamekeeper would not allow them to talk with the prisoner. And so they marched by Miks's side speaking in undertones to one another. Knowing that the gamekeeper understood no Lithuanian, they were bold enough to wonder aloud if Miks did not have murder on his conscience.

Miks Bumbullis heard everything they said. His journey was a veritable Passion. With every step the troop of the idly curious grew larger. When he finally reached the police station, Miks had the retinue of a king.

Of course he denied everything. He knew nothing of the buck. He was out shooting crows, and that was certainly not a crime.

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Wasn't he ashamed of such petty evasion? asked the judge.

No, he was not ashamed. He was doing his best to remain with the child.

At the trial he had once more to face Aluta and Madlyna. He had hoped, up to this moment, that the child would not be summoned. She was now old enough to understand his disgrace. Yet when the child did not appear he was very sorry. It would have meant so much to him to see her again.

For some time Madlyna had been less fastidious and coquettish than formerly. Her eyes had narrowed and grown shrewd. But her responses came this time as though shot from a pistol. Of course he had had the gun, but he never used it. Oh, yes; he had once shot an owl. That was all.

Aluta seemed to have forgotten completely his ill-treatment of her. He had never been out of the house at an unusual hour. He had never taken the gun from its nail. He had never brought home game, or earned money by the sale of game. It was a pity that the women were not allowed to take the oath. Aluta demanded her right thereto, but the heartless prosecutor succeeded in preventing it. Madlyna, too, seemed to him to be concealing something. And so the testimony of both women was without effect.

Even those who were eventually sworn in, however, conducted themselves with admirable restraint. Persons who had teased him many times on the sub-

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ject of his poaching could no longer remember having heard of his carrying a gun, not to mention ever having seen him with one.

But of what avail was all this magnanimity? His first offense hung over him menacingly, and the still unexplained murder hovered like a dark cloud over him. The prosecutor had only to allude to it as a suspicious circumstance to make every one feel that Miks was encompassed by forces which required only a vague motive of revenge to break loose against him. When the judge's sentence of three years' imprisonment was pronounced, Aluta, who had hitherto avoided meeting his gaze, arose, came slowly down from the witness bench, and stood for some moments solemnly shaking her head before him. Miks shuddered for days afterwards at the memory of it. Meanwhile, he controlled himself and asked permission for his family to visit him before he was transported to prison. He knew that this was his only chance to see Anikka again. Madlyna had understood, for when she followed Aluta into his cell, she had the child by the hand. Miks restrained himself with difficulty. His impulse was to fall on his knees before the child and weep endlessly. Instead, he said merely, "You are all here"; and he greeted them one after the other.

Aluta was wearing a new white lambskin and looking very smart. She said, "I could get a divorce, of course, but I am not going to. No, I am not going to."

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He replied, "Do whatever you think best. If only you will be good to the child!"

"I was good to the child," she retorted; "but you ruined everything."

He deferred to her, saying, "I will repent my sins and put them aside, if only you will promise to be good to the child."

She answered coldly, "I promise." Then she shook hands, and asked the guard to let her pass. She left, and the guard was on the point of ordering the others out too. But he saw that Miks had fallen to his knees before the child and was weeping. And because he was a good man and a decent one, he closed the door and left them.

Fondling Madlyna's dress, Miks pleaded, "Have pity on the child!"

Madlyna bowed before him gravely and said, "I swear to you that I shall look out for the child."

"And if you marry and go away, swear to me you will take the child with you."

Madlyna bowed still more deeply over him and said, "I shall not marry."

Then Miks grew calm again. He kissed the child and he kissed Madlyna. The visiting hour was ended.

12

Two years later Miks received the news of the child's death. He was not surprised, for Anikka had

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appeared to him several times in his dreams. Aluta wrote thus of the child's death:

"And now I must tell you that little Anikka has departed this life. I and Madlyna cared for her as was our duty. In order to cast out the sickness I sent Madlyna to a wise woman who told her what to do. And I cooked a viper and made her drink the juice with dried ash. In short, nothing was left undone. I gave her a funeral fit for my own child. The festivities lasted two days, during which time three kegs of ale and twenty stoups of brandy were drunk. I had a coffin made for her in which she could stretch her little body comfortably. And she was buried in her best Sunday clothes. So you see I have kept my promise, and if you ask Madlyna she cannot deny it."

Thereafter Anikka appeared to Miks every night. He had only to shut his eyes to see her standing before him. She appeared in many guises: sometimes lying in her coffin; sometimes as a bride with a wreath of rue in her hair; sometimes as an angel with glass wings; sometimes, too, in a dress stained with blood, or with a cord about her neck. And in still other forms.

He thought it auspicious that Aluta had been good to the child. The handsome funeral proved that. For if she had feared the eyes of her neighbors she would have buried the dead child as secretly as possible. Then, too, Madlyna had been there; and upon her he could depend to the last. Yet, some mistake must

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have been made, or Anikka would be at peace in her grave, and would not continue to appear to him in the spirit. It went on thus night after night. Finally the prison doctor came to him and asked what the matter was with him.

"What could be the matter?" Miks asked. "I have enough to eat, and no one is unkind to me."

The doctor ordered him to undress, and Miks undressed. But the doctor could find nothing amiss with him. Then he asked if some great sorrow had not perhaps come to him.

"I have lost a child," Miks answered. He said nothing, however, of the circumstances. For one must be ever on one's guard against these Germans.

A few days later it was the prison chaplain who called on him. This was not the chaplain who preached regularly on Sundays. He began to talk comfortably, but he had not taken the trouble to look through the prison records, or he would have discovered that Miks had no child of his own. Miks did not disabuse him. On the contrary, he kissed his hand in order to give the impression that he had found consolation. He recovered sufficiently to be happy for one whole day after one of the nightly visitations. But then he reproached himself this happiness. For if Anikka had not lacked for something in her grave, she would not have appeared to him while he slept. Either the lid of the coffin was pressing down upon her, or something had been laid over her mouth which was suffocating her. Or perhaps

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Giltinna, the goddess of death, was not appeased, as many people believe she must be. If this is not done, she takes her revenge by frightening the dead night after night out of their sleep.

He wanted to write Aluta about this, but he was afraid that the Germans would read his letter and make fun of his stupidity. Therefore he thought it very opportune when he was summoned one day by the warden and told that he had been paroled. It was added that if his conduct continued satisfactory he would never need to serve out the rest of his sentence. "Now," he thought, "I can look after the grave myself"; and he started homeward.

13

The potatoes had just been planted, and everybody was at work in the fields. Scarcely any one turned to look as he passed, and he arrived unnoticed at the house. The dog barked joyfully, and he stroked him, for the child had been fond of him. The house was empty and wide open. He was hungry, but he dared not cut a slice of bread, so strange did it seem to be back again in his own home. First he peered into the little room where Anikka's bed had stood. The bed was gone. She seemed to have been effaced completely from the world. But later he found her slate lying on Madlyna's cot, and with it a jumping rope with handles which he had once made for her. If he had not been too tired he would have gone to

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the graveyard. Instead, he sat down on a milking stool in the sunshine before the house, and waited. Then he fell asleep, and he did not waken until the sound of voices rang loud in the yard.

Aluta was the first to see him. Drawing herself erect, she came forward in her heavy field boots to meet him, looking meanwhile straight into his eyes. She was not glad, but neither was she afraid.

"They let you out at just the right time," she said, holding out her hand. "The master is very much needed at home."

"I'll go right to work," he answered, while she went in to prepare supper.

Madlyna had followed close behind her. He noticed that she had grown quite wan, and that all around her mouth were little wrinkles. She also shook hands, and then ran quickly away. A strange hired man was there, an oldish man upon whom Aluta had certainly no designs:—"So I can keep him," thought Miks. And there was a maid who looked at him curiously and did not know what to make of him.

Aluta had killed a chicken for supper. "So that everybody may know the master has come home," she explained. She seemed very kind, and kept looking at him as if in entreaty. He soaked the potatoes in the gravy, but left the meat lying in his plate.

"Why don't you eat?" protested Madlyna, whose eyes were still filled with tears.

"I'll eat it later on," he answered. "I haven't had

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anything so good in a long time." He asked for a glass of ale, but did not touch it. After supper he took the meat and ale with him into another room where he sat quietly until it grew dark. Then he took a pot and an empty flask from the cupboard, filled them with food and drink, and hid them under his coat.

"I am going for a little walk," he said, and the women did not ask where.

He found the grave without trouble. A wooden cross stood at its head. There was a little gabled roof over the cross, as is the custom for those who have died in maidenly purity, and two small wooden birds were perched on the sloping ends. Madlyna had doubtless bought them as pets for the dead child in eternity. He dug out a small hole in the gravel of the mound, and placed both flask and pot in it. Then he smoothed the gravel into place again until there was no vestige of disturbance.

Many believe that this represents nourishment for the spirit of the dead; but there are others who believe—and rightly—that the evil goddess Giltinna is appeased in this way, so that she no longer disturbs the repose of the departed soul.

Miks sat down for a while, and thought, "It's nice here." And then for the first time it seemed to him that he had really come home.

Once back in the house, he began to wonder, while the others made ready for bed, where he was expected to sleep. He knew very well that if he slept by

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himself there would be trouble again. So he crept stealthily into his wife's bed, and she acted as if he had never been away. Of her own will she began to talk about the child. Mankind is powerless against the will of the Almighty, she said. A clear conscience ought to be enough to satisfy one. And she wept. He said only, "Don't tell me anything about it." He knew he could not bear to hear any more.

That night the spirit of the child did not appear to him. He was happy, for he believed that he had done well in making an offering to the goddess Giltinna.

Next morning, he shouldered his spade, intending to work with the others in the potato field. Madlyna said to him, "You had better take a good rest first. You are still too weak to work." He was surprised that she should have so poor an opinion of his strength; but when he had hoed only a short time he found it necessary to sit down, for his breath came short. Madlyna looked at him like a mother looking at a sick child.

Aluta herself continued to be kind to him. She brought him hot pepper in vinegar and other strengthening things, and he said to himself, "If only the child were alive now, how well off we'd be." She had not appeared to him again, and he was beginning to think somewhat less reverently of Giltinna. In the meantime, he had grown to trust Aluta, so that one evening he took heart and told her of the apparitions. Then he told her how he had gone

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about protecting himself against them. She laughed and said, "If it's as easy as that, I'll kill as many hens for you as you like." That shows how kind she was to him now. Time and again he would marvel that he had formerly been so fearful of her.

Now he began to ask details of the child's illness. Not that his grief had grown less since the first night. But he had come to feel that his wife was truly sympathetic. But Aluta would answer, "You poor man! Wait a little while. You can't really bear to hear of it yet." And this she would repeat each time he spoke of it.

Then it occurred to him to ask Madlyna. But a great change had come over Madlyna. She avoided him whenever possible, was speechless at meal times, and stared holes into the table. Aluta saw clearly what was happening. She said to him one day, "Madlyna must leave the house. If she sends away the next suitor I choose for her, out she goes bag and baggage." That frightened him, for he thought he might be responsible for such a catastrophe. He resolved to do all in his power to mend things.

And so one morning he sought out Madlyna where she sat milking, and said, "You mustn't think, Madlyna, that I blame you in any way for the child's death."

She stood up from the stool and answered, "But I blame myself."

In answer to that he quoted Aluta's words about one's powerlessness before the Almighty and the sat-

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isfaction of a clear conscience. Then abruptly she put both hands on his shoulders, gazed long into his eyes with that piercing look which now she always turned on him, and said, "Come into my bed, Miks Bumbullis. There I will tell you the things you ought to know."

He was greatly upset. "I am not in the mood for such things now," he said. "Tell me just the same."

"No," she said. "I won't do it otherwise."

"I'll think it over," he said finally, and went out of the barn.

That same night the apparition returned. She was in her shift. On her shoulder was perched a bird, and she carried a twig in her hands, but it was a hemlock twig. He said nothing to Aluta about this. When evening came he ate sparingly of his food, took a pot, and bore it secretly to the graveyard. He thought no one had noticed him. But Aluta stood watching from behind the fence. This time Giltinna was not so easily appeased, for the child appeared to him again the following night.

"It will have to be a rooster again," he said to himself. But a mysterious voice told him not to ask Aluta to have one killed. Nevertheless, the ghostly form rose up again, and his uneasiness remained. Finally, he took courage, and one day while his wife was in the fields he followed Madlyna into her room. When she saw him come in, she folded her hands and sighed, like a person prepared to die at last in happiness. And so he lay with her, and he knew

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finally as her head lay on his shoulder that it was for her alone he had ever and ever yearned.

She wept unceasingly, and kissed his hands. After a while, he reminded her of the promise. Kneeling beside the bed, she pleaded, "Don't make me tell! don't make me tell!" But he insisted; and when she saw there was no escape she told him how Aluta had killed the child. And never in the world could she be convicted.

In his immediate rage he gripped Madlyna's throat and would have strangled her had she not struggled with him. "Kill me, then," she said finally; "kill me! Up there in the corn rafters you will see the noose with which I intended to kill myself. And I should have done it if you hadn't come home suddenly."

He sprang out of bed and ran out to the grindstone. Aluta was still at work in the potato furrows when she saw a man rushing upon her, half clothed and swinging an ax. She recognized her husband and knew at once what had happened and that she was about to die. Screaming, she ran in the direction of the village, he following her with upraised ax. She dared not pause at one of the scattered farmhouses, for she knew that no lock and key, no human hand, could prevent his killing her. So she ran on, and the space between them grew steadily shorter.

Not far off she saw the house of the district police. At once she realized that the only way she could save herself was by confessing to the police. No one could

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ever prove that she had used poison, and perjury was easily atoned for. Miks stopped when he saw where she was running, for the guard's pistols were always loaded. He turned back, and those who had been following him now formed a wide circle around him.

The house was as empty as when he had first come home. Even for Madlyna he called in vain. He put on a warm coat, collected a little money, took an old gun from the rafters where it had hung since his poaching days, and crept on his stomach from ditch to ditch. When darkness came he fled across the border. Russia is a vast country.

14

The police reported the incident, and the officers of the law applied themselves with great zeal to the case. A warrant was issued, police headquarters everywhere were notified, and extradition proceedings were even initiated, so that if he were caught in Russia there might be no delay in bringing him to justice. Aluta, who, despite her self-accusation, was still at liberty, laughed and said to people, "Never fear; the child will bring him back." She was careful to stay at home, however, and when she went abroad it was only for a short time and always in the company of others. She still feared that Miks might be lying in wait for her.

Night after night she went with the police to their

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post behind the fence at the graveyard. The men took alternate watches, for no one could endure the night vigil long. But she was always there. By day she went about like a wild animal. Where and when she slept, no one knew. Whenever one of the strange policemen, who relieved the local men on alternate nights, came shivering to her towards morning and said, "I think we are on a wild goose chase, for he would be an awful idiot to throw himself into our arms," she would rage and groan and beg for patience, assuring the *Pons Wackmeisteris*, the policeman, that the child would get him, would surely get him.

But what she did not know was that at the same time, and not far from the graveyard, Madlyna lay in the ditch next the road which ran from the Russian frontier to the village. She was in hiding in the house of a former suitor whose wife was grateful for her rejection of him. And every evening at dark she went out to watch, lest Miks be tempted to return. Sometimes it was cold. Often it rained. But she minded neither cold nor wet. The hardest thing was to stay awake. And she generally placed one of her heavy boots on her head. When sleep overcame her and her head drooped, the boot would drop on to her knee, and this pain would waken her. Now and again the low sound of voices or the clank of sabers was heard from the graveyard. Sometimes, when the wind blew in the right direction, the smell of tobacco smoke was wafted towards her. When

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such things happened she would laugh scornfully and shake her fists into the darkness. So long as she was awake there was no danger.

One night, it might have been the fourteenth or fifteenth of her long vigil, sleep must have overcome her. Perhaps it was that he had not come by way of the road but had gone across fields. For suddenly she heard from the graveyard the report of guns and the sound of men's voices and the shrewish screams of Aluta. She knew then that they had him. Weeping, she rushed in the direction of the light which had flared up in the darkness. She saw him coming towards her. Two men held him prisoner, while Aluta danced around him showing her teeth and putting out her tongue. In his belt hung the neck of a wide-mouthed bottle which had probably been broken in the struggle. It had contained an offering to the goddess Giltinna, an attempt to purchase once more the eternal peace of the child.

Madlyna threw herself into his path and kissed the iron links into which his bleeding hands had been thrust.

He stared through and beyond her with unseeing eyes, and strode forward to meet his destiny.

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JONS AND ERDMA

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JONS AND ERDMA

It was Easter Sunday afternoon. Their names were Jons Baltruschat and Erdma Maurus, they were lovers, and they were sitting on the edge of a ditch beside the road that runs past the Matzick Wood. Lord, how strange it is that everything on earth insists upon love! Even the most miserable of people, those who can scarcely keep body and soul together, yearn to build a nest.

Jons was what the Lithuanians call an *antrininkas*, that is, the servant of a servant. What more need I say of him? Erdma had chosen to make her way among the Germans. For the time being, she was a scullery maid at the Schlopsnies Inn, not far from the railway station in Heydekrug, a place known generally in the town as the Hotel Lousecrush. A little inaccurately, as a matter of fact, for the inn had recently risen in the world, and even the better type of cattle dealer occasionally stopped there now.

They were in their best clothes. Jons had put on his polished Sunday boots and his black cloth jacket and Turkish neckerchief. And Erdma—Erdma had become quite a lady and would no longer dream of wearing the Lithuanian garb. She had knotted a white zephyr kerchief about her head and wore a half-silk blouse which hooked down the back. The waitress had given it her because it got in the way.

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Jons and Erdma were young, strong, and handsome. But that was all. They had no parents who might own a house and a farm. As a usual thing they preferred not to mention who their parents were.

Erdma was pressed for time. Towards eight o'clock the town workmen would be coming to the inn, bringing their cakes with them from the bakery and expecting clean plates to eat on. The inn had become a very smart place indeed. Out in the kitchen the sardines were kept in oil, and there was no harm in drinking what oil was left over. Thinking of this sort of thing abashed Jons greatly. How could a wife accustomed to such affluence be content with the life he had to offer? But Erdma allayed his fears. What was all that compared with owning one's home? Life only began when you had a place of your own. Jons agreed heartily. But how was that done? The birds hopping around them, looking for wisps of straw, had an easy time of it. Their building materials were free for the taking, and they were never asked to pay for the spot on which they built their nest. Erdma, who was a bright, spirited girl, cheered him up. After all, it wasn't as if they hadn't a thing in the world.

Quickly, they brought forth their purses and emptied them out on the ground. They were careful, however, not to confuse the two treasures, for they could not pool their resources until, following the marriage ceremony, their possessions had been declared community property. Erdma's store was much

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larger than his; so large, in fact, that he almost grew peevish about it and asked where it had come from. In truth she was a little embarrassed, but able to account for it all. The twenty-mark gold piece which constituted the foundation of her fortune had been given her by a drunken man who was later arrested. But that did not matter, since no one had ever tried to get it back from her. Nor was the balance the reward of favors of a kind to which a prospective bridegroom might object. It was honestly earned and came from respectable guests of the inn who went out once at the most to the kitchen to give a playful squeeze to a girl who couldn't help herself. There had been a rich cattle dealer who had wished to adopt her. After talking often about it, he had dropped the subject and made her a present of nine marks, which was all he had with him at the time.

Clearly, there was nothing here that called for protest. But the miserable twenty-five marks which Jons had saved—and at what sacrifice!—out of two years' wages, still seemed unworthy to be put beside her wealth.

"What difference does that make?" Erdma asked. "Between us we have ninety-one marks. And when we have one hundred, we can build a house."

"Where?" he grumbled; "on the moon?"

"No, not on the moon. Close to this very spot, on the other side of Heydekrug, on the way to Russ, in the Bismarck Colony. On the Rupkalva Moor."

"Oh, in the Bismarck Colony, where all the thieves

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and murderers live," said Jons. It was a fact that the Bismarck Colony did not enjoy a good reputation. But Erdma was annoyed. In the first place, there are thieves and murderers everywhere. And secondly, they would at least have a roof over their heads. They would be the guests, as it were, of the Prussian State, which had thrown open the marsh to free settlement. And one could not ask for a more distinguished host.

Jons doubted that it was possible to build a house for one hundred marks, but Erdma was sure of it. "Naturally, one has to help things along a bit," she said, and smiled slyly at him. "Everybody does it, and the Steward of the marsh knows exactly how it is done."

At that Jons laughed, and the agreement was sealed. They stood up and brushed off their clothes, then looked at one another and agreed that they made a handsome couple. He was straight, thick-chested, muscular, with broad shoulders and two fists that held on tightly to what they once laid hold of. She was a true maid of all work, high-bosomed, with plump arms and legs of iron and arched neck and glowing cheeks in which two crafty and humorous eyes scanned the world for possible prey. Two real soldiers of fortune were they, strong enough to resist the rude blows of life and cunning enough to circumvent adversity.

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2

First there was the Steward of the marsh to be seen. The Steward was the omnipotent ruler of the colony, the conscientious arbiter of the destiny of two thousand souls whom he guided along lines laid down by the Government. Above him there was only the General Commission; but who or what that might be, few could imagine.

Three days later they went to call on the Steward. By guile and main strength they had freed themselves from service. Erdma had taunted her mistress into throwing a scouring brush at her head, after which she had threatened to complain to the police of physical maltreatment. Thus she had come away not only with a reference, but with consolation money as well. Jons, who had endured less and also earned less, had merely offered to beat his master to death if he were not released. There are times when a threat works, and others when it makes matters worse. This time it had worked, and he was free.

And so they started cheerfully out on the Russ road which leads to the colony. Just beyond the Szlaszen graveyard the colony begins, and it stretches so far out into the marsh that nobody can see to its distant limits. As they crossed the long bridge over the swampy lowlands, Erdma leaned against the dull white rail and pointed below to the cowslips which thrust their butter-yellow heads above the stagnant water. "The flowers are able to live without drown-

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ing," she said; "and so shall we." And Jons agreed.

But when they reached the roadhouse which had been transformed into the Steward's residence, their hearts sank. The Steward was a robust man of about forty, with grave eyes and a mouth which seemed always on the verge of a smile. He did not look precisely hard, but his speech was sharp and measured, and the fact that he was so powerful made them tremble before him.

"So, you want to build yourselves a house," he said.

"Yes."

"Are you married?"

They were not, but the banns could be put up at any moment. Right now, if he wished.

"Are your papers in order?"

They had everything with them, beginning with their baptismal certificates.

"Have you the necessary funds?"

Had they not! With timid pride they drew forth their treasure. The gold piece lying on top seemed to impress the Steward; for the first time, a smile crossed his face. Reaching for his cap and stick he said, "Come along."

He led them along a street made of logs and dried clay which led straight from the highway into the marsh. At first sight it seemed anything but a marsh. As far as they could see into the grey mist to right and left of them there were nothing but houses standing in the midst of potato fields. These were

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houses that had cost a bit more than one hundred marks, though. Even a thousand marks would not have paid for one of them. They were surrounded by barns and sheds, painted right down to the garden fences, and leading straight up from each gate to the house was a small avenue of ash trees and birches. Their hearts grew heavier. They did not dare speak, for if they had spoken their thoughts they might have turned round and gone back. How could any one dream of calling such splendor his own!

They must have gone on like this for half an hour. One farm followed another, one field another. From time to time, as though overlooked by mistake, they would come upon a clump of dwarf pines, scarcely strong enough to bear needles, growing on a slight mound. Gradually the scene changed. The houses became poorer, more modest, let us say. There were no more outbuildings, and instead of cultivated fields, barren marshes stretched endlessly on, broken only by square brackish pools where the peat had been cut. A young swamp growth sprouted around them, and except for it everything was dun-colored and shriveled.

The Steward had not once spoken to them on the way out. Turning now he said, "This is where you may choose a spot to build on." He walked on ahead, turned aside onto the marshy ground which splashed and sank beneath his feet, and wherever he would pull out his stick from the ground, a small shining pool of water would appear. Jons finally

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relieved his stricken heart by asking almost in a groan, "Is it really possible to build here?"

The Steward pointed in a circle with his stick. "All these houses were built on this same ground," he said. "Draining it is your affair."

Jons and Erdma looked at one another and thought, "What the others were able to do, we can do." And so, haphazardly, they looked about for a site for their house and farm. But they continued on the verge of tears.

Lifting his feet high, the Steward stepped off the approximate area they might possess. "This parcel," he said, coming to a halt, "the State gives you for the settling of it. It will, of course, be surveyed exactly, and will be two and one-half acres in extent. If things go well with you, later you will be allowed seven and one-half more. Stop at my house on your way back; there are papers to be signed. Meanwhile, think it over. If you need advice, I am here to give it. Good luck and good morning." He shook hands with them and was gone.

They stood staring at one another. Yes or no? If it was no, that meant going back into service, perhaps with a harder master or a more lowly one than the last,—although the second was scarcely likely. It meant renouncing for years all thought of hearth and home. And what was the good of their youth and their ebullient energy if it was to be spent in the service of others? Therefore, yes, a thousand times yes! "What the others were able to do, we can do,"

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Jons repeated aloud, and Erdma agreed. With that they made up their minds.

Their immediate need was shelter during the coming months. They went over to two people whom they saw at work in a field, and said, "We are going to build in the neighborhood. Can you rent us a room in the meantime?"

The man, who had mild eyes and long grey hair which fell over a thin beardless face to his shoulders, looked at them a long moment, and asked, "Are you married?"

Erdma lied quickly. "Yes," she said. For she reflected that their true status, however short its duration, would prejudice against them even the best-intentioned people.

The woman, who was no longer young, and who looked as if she would like to go into the subject at great length but had no words, said finally, "We are devout believers. Those who do not live according to the command of the Lord are not welcome in our house."

Erdma said, "We too seek to find favor with the Enlightened." She knew at once that this avowal would win them free lodging. She would bring bedding with her, she added. And so they got their shelter.

Then they went back to the Steward. He had filled out a long document, and after looking once more through their papers he had Jons sign his name. At the same time, as he was the registrar of the parish,

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he entered them in his book as an engaged couple. Jons, remembering Erdma's falsehood, said, "Time is short. Shall we be allowed to move in even though we are not yet married?"

The Steward smiled as he had done when he had seen their money. "No one reads my records," he said.

With that they were dismissed.

There was still one thing to be done, the most important of all, except, naturally, the visit to the clergyman in order that the banns be put up. This was that Jons get regular work. Their livelihood would just be assured by the daily wage, and a few coppers might be added from time to time to the building fund. The alternatives were the peat factory and the sawmill. Both needed men, now that spring had come. Jons choose the sawmill because there he might very soon be able to get cheap lumber—if luck was with him, even free lumber.

They went back over the long road to Heydekrug. At the sawmill Jons had no sooner asked for work than he had in his pocket an order to report the next day. Two marks a day! Never in his life had he earned as much. As night fell they reflected that this was the most momentous day in their lives. But it had also made them very hungry. And as neither wished to spend any money, while both looked too young and decent to beg, they dug up a few potatoes in a field on their way back to the old couple. This was certainly a sin, but the owner had potatoes

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enough, and so no one suffered from it. They reached the house with filled pockets. And because they sang a hymn while their potatoes were on the fire, the pious host added a slice of bacon to their meal.

3

Nothing could be done until the land had been drained; so it was with this that they began. Erdma dug the trench almost entirely by herself. Even though Jons did get up at three in the morning, at five he had to be on his way to the sawmill, and in the evening his help was not of much use, for his arms hung then by his sides like heavy sacks. But Erdma did it. She stood up to her knees in the icy water, cutting and digging, digging and cutting, right through the stubborn roots which often seemed a successful defiance to human strength.

Pious Taruttis (this was the old man's name) would watch from a distance her immense labor. Following a sympathetic impulse, he would often leave his own work and come to help her over the hard places. In return, however, Jons found to his dismay that they had to waste the precious free hours of Sunday singing hymns and praying. Being devout is very beautiful and very essential; but one must have leisure for it. Otherwise it becomes a nuisance.

The opportunity to work in the sawmill had proved a great boon. Day after day one learned quite

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casually, chatting with the carters, just where and in what part of the forest lay the right sort of timber, ready to be spirited away at night. But Jons was not the man to allow himself to fall unprepared into the grip of any watchman who might lie in wait to handcuff him. The first of the four strong Scotch fir logs, indispensable as the corner pillars of the house still to be built, he bought for good money from a landowner who had felled a splendid section of his wood in order to meet the unwelcome interest on his mortgage. For this Jons took a formal bill of sale which he kept constantly in his pocket as an instrument of protection. And when, the second night thereafter, he and Erdma brought home another log not quite so validly obtained, he could still enjoy the clear conscience which such a bit of paper imparts to its bearer. Kindly Taruttis, who of course suspected nothing, had lent them his handcart in the bottom of which he had placed a Bible text bordered with gold. Whether it was this text or something else that helped, the third log also arrived without mishap. But before the fourth could be procured, there was an unavoidable intervention: the wedding.

Because of their hosts, this ceremony had to be carried out with the utmost secrecy. It cost two fifty-pfennig pieces at the registrar's to hire the two witnesses whom Jons had picked up on the road. Fortunately, they were willing also to act at the church wedding on the following Sunday in return for three drams of sweet brandy. The Steward, who per-

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formed the civil marriage, seemed not in the least festive. He had not once turned up the lights, in such slight esteem did he hold them. When it was over he held out his hand, however, and said, "From now on you can live honorably together." As if that were possible without the sanction of the church!

Pious old Taruttis was not greatly pleased to see the young couple start for church on Sunday morning, dressed in their best. To him, pulpit oratory was merely a kind of heathen gibberish. But since they already half belonged to the circle of the Enlightened, he hoped by fervent prayer to be able soon to accomplish their complete conversion. Therefore he bore them no grudge. In the garden they gathered furtively a few sprigs of young rue which they thought would serve as a symbol of their marriage. Then they trudged the long way to the church.

Their witnesses were on hand, but instead of going down to the front pews as a wedding party always does, Jons and Erdma preferred to hide behind a pillar at the back of the church. Nor did they wear their little clusters of rue, which were soon crushed between their hot fingers. The service ended, but there came in immediately a great wedding company which, with its flower-bedecked carriages, had filled the entire square in front of the church. Beribboned ushers ran here and there, and the attendants of the bridegroom were like a royal marshal's imperial guard. Erdma and Jons sat huddled in a corner.

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And their witnesses smelled of the cow barns. But when the last member of the great wedding party had left the church they took heart and went up the aisle.

The clergyman, a young man with the face of a visionary, looked benevolently at them. When he saw that because of their poverty they dared not step up to the altar, he opened the red upholstered chancel, went out to meet them, and led them up with his own hands.

He did not confine himself to the text of the Book from which he read but delivered an address as beautiful as though they had paid for it in advance. He thought it most fortunate that they, filled with the strength of youth and hope, had decided to journey through life together. He pictured for them what they might expect eventually to attain if they worked with industry and assiduity for their happiness, and if above all—above all, above all!—they never departed from the straight and narrow path of honesty.

Jons wept and Erdma wept, and they swore never to forget the preacher's admonition. But when the witnesses had been paid their three drams, and it had begun to grow dark, they had to set out to procure the fourth log from the forest. Each day's delay meant a loss to them. They went to get the handcart which they had carefully hidden the day before. And thus, instead of inaugurating their new life as others do, with feasting and dancing, they set out, anxious and ashamed, on their errand of theft.

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"It can't possibly be a sin for people as poor as we are," Erdma comforted him and herself.

"It is a sin," Jons answered; "the preacher told us so to-day. But when we are rich we will make good everything we have stolen."

This they promised one another while they waited in the ditch beside the road for the stillness and obscurity of night to come down. And they made still other promises. They would allow no quarrel to arise between them. No venomous words should cross their lips. They would set their children a good example in everything.

"Yes," said Jons; "our children must be well provided for."

Erdma became enthusiastic. "If I have daughters they will wear nothing but velvet and silk. Their weddings will last a week. And the bridegroom's father will be nothing less than a constable."

The thought of constables, however, gave them an unpleasant shock. And so they did not elaborate the theme, but vanished hastily into the darkness of Matzick Wood, where the fourth pillar of their incipient riches lay glimmering faintly in the guise of a freshly felled Scotch fir.

4

It is easy enough to talk about house building when you have food stored up for the winter. They hadn't. The days were growing hot; it was time to look to the sowing of the potato seed.

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Jons surveyed the area which could be worked this first spring, and Erdma borrowed a marsh hoe. Once the cross trenches were cut, as they had to be before the land would be well drained, cultivation could begin.

One Friday morning towards the end of May—if one may speak of a time as morning when the stars are still shining—they started with their spade and hoe over the barren marshland where the four logs had lain stored for future use. The reed stalks which Jons had thrust into the ground marked the four corners of the field which was to be. Both were preoccupied and solemn. Too troubled in conscience to trust themselves to pray together, each repeated his *Paternoster* in secret to himself, as if hoping it might work a miracle upon their wrongdoing. Then they fell to work.

The topmost layer of the marsh consisted of a living plant growth which had to be chopped and leveled off, for it was only when the subsoil was mixed with this layer that its natural fertility would produce crops, however scantily. The two hours of early morning flew by. Jons had then to go to work at the sawmill, so that his wages might provide the materials needed in the building of the house. It was incredible how many things had to be got. First came the boards by means of which the corner posts would be held together and the framework of the house made to stand four-square. Then the wood for the roof, and the beams, and the bricks for the

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chimney—and many other things, only part of which could be got by pilfering. Each of them worked hard in his fashion, neither wishing to lag behind the other. One cannot say of people who work from three in the morning until eight at night that they are sparing of their effort. Thus they made rapid progress.

One morning, as Erdma paused to wipe the dripping sweat from her face, she looked up and saw the Steward standing before her. She was frightened, remembering that the twelve marks rental for the first year (after which it would be thirty) had not yet been paid.

He said, "It is late in the year. Will you get through with your sowing in time?"

"God willing we will," she answered.

"God wills as man wills," he said. "If He sees that you work hard, He will put no obstacle in your way."

Then he looked at the four tree trunks which, stripped of their bark, shone like silver in the sun.

"Fine logs you have there," he said, looking at her out of the corner of his eye and twisting his mouth slightly. It was as if not one of those night raids had been hidden from him. In her embarrassment Erdma scraped the black mud from her legs with her soles. She expected him to ask where the logs had come from; but he said nothing. A pile of boards lay beside the logs. These Jons had been allowed to pick out from the débris in the lumber yard for a small sum. The Steward inspected them

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one by one, pointing out the defective wood with his stick.

"Well, these were honestly come by; easy to see that," he said. And he went his way without a word of farewell.

"He passes by like God," thought Erdma, happy to have escaped with her skin. There was a great deal about him that she did not understand; but so there was about God.

At the weekly market, Jons had bought three bushels of potato seed of the thin-skinned, glassy smooth kind that is especially suited to marshy soil. These they cut in two and laid in a shallow furrow, on the very surface of the ground, almost. For not far beneath, the water still gurgled.

"And we bought them honestly," said Erdma with pride. This time they were not ashamed to offer up a prayer of thanksgiving. But there was still a great deal to be pilfered. It would have been absurd to pay cold cash for the rafters when timber lay about invitingly in the wood. Still, they had to be careful. So Jons once more bought and paid for the first load; and he was annoyed because he could not wear the receipt on the vizor of his cap. No one ever inquired again whether everything was in due form. The Steward alone had the right to ask such questions, and he said nothing.

Night after night they railed against fate because human beings had to sleep from time to time. Taruttis still suspected nothing. The receipt had

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blinded his eyes to everything. All that disturbed his gentle soul was that they did not take time to pray. And so he prayed devoutly for them while they gayly brought home stolen goods in his hand-cart. And Taruttena, his wife, in order not to be outdone by him, got up before daylight to prepare something hot for their breakfast. Things went on like this and the building fund grew smaller and smaller. At last the day approached when they could proceed to build their house. But the strength of two was not enough for this work, so at Taruttis' suggestion, Erdma decided to form a *talka* among the neighbors.

A *talka* is a coöperative group of workers. Upon community labor of this kind depends much of the success of people like themselves who can never afford to pay hired workmen. Those who have been helped before show their gratitude by helping in their turn; and the community building ends in a gay party at which the host provides as much food and drink as he can, however little that may be.

Taruttis pointed out to Erdma the houses at which she might and those at which she might not call. Here lived some one who would help because he had received help himself; there, some one who would not help. Erdma went first to the man whose small house stood not a hundred steps away on the other side of the road.

His name was Witkuhn, he came from over Goldaps way, and he had traveled great distances in

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the world. He was said to have been as far away as the marshlands of the west, and was therefore entirely fitted to give advice to even the very oldest settlers in the colony. He was a blond, timid man who seemed to Erdma in his middle thirties, and who had a habit of looking vaguely off into space while he talked, his lower jaw trembling meanwhile violently. When he saw Erdma come striding across the fields fresh from work, her skirt pinned high and her sleeves tucked up, he opened his eyes wide in astonishment at the magnificence of her body and then, as if afraid, looked away. He spoke Lithuanian correctly, but with a foreign accent, somewhat as clergymen speak it who have learned the language late in life. As a matter of fact, he looked like a German in disguise. But he was kind and courteous to her,—only, he could not look directly at her. His wife came along after a bit. She also was half Lithuanian, a small, oh, so mournful woman, with greyish skin and tired eyes. She stared enviously at Erdma's robust figure, but a moment later her greeting was quite friendly.

"If we are to be neighbors," she said, "pray God there may be peace between us." As she spoke she looked not at Erdma but at her husband. Even from her he had turned his eyes away.

"That is something we must see to, not God," Erdma replied, and she left. She felt drawn towards these people, yet it was plain to see there was unhappiness in their house.

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Another man to whom she was sent by Taruttis lived in a cottage on the edge of a small wood. It was built on a sandy stretch and was so low that if you stood up on a footstool you could look over and beyond the house. There was a barn, and behind it were two lean cows plucking at the tufts of green rushes. The owner's name was Smailus, and he had quite recently buried his second wife. He was a great, strong fellow who had to stoop to enter his own door. He had a sharp Polish face and the long beard of a *hetman;* but his eyes had a dull and sleepy expression, as though he were indifferent to the whole world.

Close behind him as he came out of the house walked a little girl whose eyes were as lively as his were dead. She was about twelve years old, or thirteen at the most. Her feet were bare, and her clothes were torn, but at her throat there was a golden brooch. She plunged immediately into the conversation, saying that she was only the daughter of a very small landowner, but the daughter of a landowner just the same; and what she could do to make life easier for those in need of help she certainly would do.

Erdma looked in amazement at this creature who was as ready with her words as an old woman. The father seemed to take her volubility for granted, and observed merely, "Yes, yes; building and burying are two things that nobody should do alone."

"He must have had experience of burying,"

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Erdma thought as she thanked them. The child walked back with her part way, chattering ceaselessly the while. She was soon to be confirmed, she said; and then she would go to the city to make her fortune as waitress or sales-person, as many of the colony girls had done. First, however, she must see about finding her father another wife. She would like some one strong and beautiful, like Erdma, but she would have to have money. The second wife, whose brooch she was wearing, had had money, but not enough. If Erdma knew of any one, she would go right off to fetch her.

Erdma did not know any one, but the child's speech went to her head like wine. Everything that she had once vaguely felt to be the ultimate goal in life was in that child's ambition for herself. But Erdma's fate was now so firmly fixed that no one in the world could ever change it. It lay now deeply embedded in the loam of this marsh, which had neither surface nor bottom, and which never surrendered what it had once entangled in the network of its roots.

The child's name was Ulela. "That is an old-fashioned name," she said, "which I naturally shall not keep when I make my own way." With that she went back. Sadly and wonderingly, Erdma watched her thin, bare legs flit over the ground as though never touching it, while her rags fluttered about her like two bat wings.

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"It is too late for me now," thought Erdma. "I must wait until I have daughters."

Farther away on the left stood a house which seemed older than the others, although it was part of their community. From a distance it looked mournful and woebegone. She wanted to know how one got on here when one was dreadfully poor. She wanted to know by way of horrible example, as it were. But old Taruttis had passed that house over. When, in the morning, she asked about it again, he turned aside and busied himself with the sharpening of his scythe, although there was nothing now to mow. So for the third time she asked him. He said, "I have never spoken ill of my neighbors, and I had rather say nothing than speak ill of some one." She decided to ask Ulela about the house.

That same afternoon, while she was on her knees in the potato patch, she heard herself called from the road. Turning, she saw a little old man seated on the edge of the ditch, with an armful of willow twigs beside him. He was peeling one of the wands with a pocket-knife.

"What do you want?" she asked, going on with her work.

"You were out to-day getting up a *talka*, weren't you?" he called.

"Perhaps I was," she returned. "One can always make use of helping hands."

"I've got a pair of hands myself," he said.

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"Do you belong around here?" she asked.

"I do," he said, "and you went past my house twice yesterday." With his knife he pointed towards the hut of which Taruttis had refused to speak. Her curiosity was aroused. She put down the thin-edged board with which she had been smoothing the furrow, and went over to him. What she saw protruding from his beggarly rags was a toothless, squint-eyed old man's face, without eyebrows or eyelashes, covered with wrinkles and furrows and an ugly, flame-colored eruption. His appearance was enough to make anybody shudder.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I am a deserving man," he said, beginning to peel a fresh willow wand. "For thirty-five years I served the State, and now I am bringing suit because the Government will not pay me an old age pension. Others can breed young pigs, but I have to weave reeds, because my services are not recognized, although I gave them entirely without pay. I am still very strong, and if you invite me to the *talka* I'll lift the beams up for you as if they were nothing but toys."

Erdma was on the point of inviting him when she remembered the words of caution spoken by kindly old Taruttis, and the horror she had felt on first seeing him close to. So she answered, "I thank you, neighbor, for your good will. But we've got all the help we can use."

A sudden rage seized the old man. He sprang up

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from the edge of the ditch and spat his anger into her face. "So, you don't want me either, you poison-snout!" he shrieked. "Have those gossips already filled you with horrible lies about me? No one wants me. No one will take the horror of the madhouse from me. But I'll get even with you! When misfortune comes and brings great misery, when the flood dissolves your houses into pulp, and you and your brood sink into the water while you huddle near the chimney and cry for mercy, then I'll laugh and hitch up Noah's Ark. And when I pass your house I'll laugh at the death squeal of your pigs and the death low of your cattle. But most of all I'll laugh at you yourselves when the chimney crumbles into bits and the floating ice cuts your throats across. So be it! Amen."

With that he took up his bundle of twigs, drew the ragged covering about his body, and went his way. But he kept turning round and shaking his fist while he spouted a red stream of words.

Erdma felt as if a bit of hell fire had fallen upon her. If that was to be the end, what was the use of building at all? And why had the others built? Yet, all around their houses stood, and their windows gleamed in the afternoon sun. It must have been the Evil One himself who had tried to discourage her.

Nevertheless, when Jons came home from work, and showed her proudly all the things he had brought with him, she was still quiet and depressed. There

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were many packages of great four-inch nails, for without nails nothing could be put together. Then, for the guests, there were two bottles of corn whiskey from the Schmidt distillery, and the ingredients for a cake which would have to be baked that very day. Taruttena supplied the flour, and along with it many edifying texts. And just as the cocks were crowing in the early morning, Erdma carried the first steaming slice of cake out to her husband on the building site where, like a skilled carpenter, he had worked the whole night through, hewing rafters. But she said nothing to him of the wicked old man.

5

Night came once more and found the house built. The four pillars were thrust so deep into the ground that the water now standing in small black pools around them had spurted into the air like fountains. Then the laths had been fastened and nailed; beams and rafters formed the framework of the roof; and what would later be the ceiling had been nailed into place. All around, looking like slabs of earth, lay squares cut from the topmost stratum of the marsh. They were not to be used to make a lawn, but would be needed later as an outside covering for the boarded sides of the house, forming thus a kind of stone wall which, in winter, would afford warmth and protection from the elements. Meanwhile, the party had sat down on them to rest. There was pious Taruttis,

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of course, with his still more devout wife; Witkuhn, the half-German foreigner; and tall Smailus, with his daughter Ulela who was always interrupting him. Up to this moment, however, she had been perched like a bird high up on the beams. And when no one else could climb up to slip a noose over the heavy beams that had to be drawn up into place, Ulela was there to do it. She made very little ado about it, the nimble creature.

They were all tired and looking forward with pleasure to the small feast which their host was able to offer them. Each sat with a bit of cake in his lap while the gleaming bottle went round and round many times. Only Witkuhn's wife was missing. "She is always miserable," he said; "and has to go to bed with the chickens."

"I shall soon prove my gratitude to you, neighbor," said Erdma. He did not answer, but over his suffering face a glow spread as of forbidden pleasure. The night was clear, as nights are in early June, and the moon was quite high. Taruttis suggested that they sing a hymn in order that the spirits of evil might not destroy the unfinished house. In the midst of the singing, Erdma saw a figure moving restlessly back and forth in the road, which was about a hundred feet away. She was frightened, for she recognized the wicked old man of yesterday. Her voice failed her, but not wishing to interrupt the hymn she waited until they had finished. Then she pointed towards the shadow that seemed now, in the

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uncertain moonlight, to be dancing. They all turned away their faces. No one spoke. Everybody seemed terrified. Even Jons took quite a time to ask what the matter was.

"Sh!" sounded Taruttena. Tall Smailus grunted something about *Kipszas*, Satan, and his daughter Ulela leaned towards Erdma and said in a whisper, "Strange that he didn't ask to come to the *talka* to-day, for new people don't know about him." Erdma, also in a low voice, told what had happened the day before. "He keeps on trying," Taruttis remarked. "The poor man can't get over the fact that no one wants anything to do with him." Jons wanted to know why, and Erdma observed that although his appearance was truly terrifying, that alone couldn't be the reason. Then they learned his frightful story. It was more appalling than anybody could dream.

He had spent almost all his life in prison as a self-confessed and convicted murderer. First he had dragged a man to death, a man with whom he had gone for a drive at night in a cart. He had done it by looping one end of a leather strap around the man's arm and the other end around the rim of the wheel, and driving off. For this he served more than twenty years. When he was released he tried the same trick a second time, on a carter whom he found dead drunk in his wagon in the woods. But this time he failed, for somehow his own hand had caught in the wheel. And because he failed, he was

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lucky enough not to be sent up for life, even though it was a second offense. And now he lived like a badger in that hut which he had built as a young man and which, between prison terms, he had fitted with all sorts of secret contrivances against inundation. What exactly they were, no one knew, for no one went into his house. And outside, all that could be seen was a great irregular pile of dung which hid the wall up to the window.

Erdma was not easily frightened, yet chills ran along her spine. While the old murderer danced in the road in his eagerness for human companionship, she repeated in the same hushed voice the horrible terms in which he had depicted the coming of the flood. Jons listened attentively and then asked the very question which yesterday had spun round and round in her head like a mill-wheel. "If the flood is really coming, why do we build here at all?"

Witkuhn, who had traveled far, said almost solemnly, "We build here because we are poor people in need of shelter. Elsewhere they give us none. They hound us all the time." Then he told them that twice already the high water had caused incalculable damage, and that this might happen even more often in the future. The unfortunate thing was that when the marsh was prepared for cultivation the peat moss dried off, so that the land brought under cultivation sank lower year after year. The virtue of work was itself a danger in that it threatened with extinction that which each of them had

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created by his hard work. "And why do we, nevertheless, go on working?" he asked in conclusion, drawing his coat closer, like a man who feels himself saved at last. "Because we love this bit of earth that is too poor for others and where for that very reason no one pursues us. And we love those who live as we live, and who suffer with us."

"And we love also God," said pious Taruttis, "who bestows upon us both good and evil, and whose providence makes even a murderer of man."

They all looked in alarm towards the road, for Taruttis had spoken in a louder tone than the others. But the ghostly grey figure had vanished.

6

How does one go about the building of a chimney? How do you set up a stove? This earth will support nothing. Set anything heavy down on it and the earth draws it into itself, yields and sinks slowly down.

But Witkuhn was ready with counsel. He knew all the tricks of life on the marsh, and he was always on hand when needed, though he never came forward of his own free will. Like a timid dog, he would slink about the house and wait until he was called. And if he wasn't called, he went away.

Although he had been fairly well Germanized, he did not act like those big-mouthed Germans who look upon all Lithuanians as so many cattle. Nor did he

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associate with Germans, although many of them lived here, for the colony took in all the homeless who turned up. His wife was truly a tribulation. She dragged herself around and did her work with loud lamentation, so that if spry little Ulela had not been there to help, the most essential things would often have been left undone. Erdma was frequently there now. She snatched many a quarter hour from her own work to look after Witkuhn's house in those hours when he was out in the fields. "If my child were alive," the woman would say, "she could have helped me in so many ways." Her child had died at birth, and the mother had been so mangled that her body had never healed. Now she was unable to be either a wife to her husband or a housekeeper in her home. There was still, however, the great misfortune of which she never spoke, yet which one sensed as soon as one was within sight of their house.

"Yes," Witkuhn said one day, "the way you build a chimney is, you buy—" He said *buy*, not *get*. "You buy the root stumps of a silver fir. It must not be a Scotch fir, whose root is shaped like a sharp stake and disappears into the ground as though it had never existed. It must be a silver fir, with sections of roots running crosswise in every direction; they interlock like bolts when the stump is on the point of sinking. One of them ought to be enough to hold the chimney in place, and another the stove."

And so at night Jons wandered into the forest

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looking for the places where silver fir had been uprooted. He found very few such places, for the silver fir is a costly tree and less common than the Scotch fir. Once more Taruttis lent them his handcart, and Jons and Erdma started off for the Norkait Wood, which was a good two miles distant. The Prussian State is rich. What difference did one or two tree stumps make to it? It could easily dispense with both or more.

Others must have been of the same opinion and to the same trouble, for the bed of mud was deep indeed. One stump had to be laid above the other, and not until this had been done was the foundation firm enough for the structure of brick and clay built above it. It was sad that bricks could not be *got*. The rich owner of the great kiln nearby kept a watchman and dogs as well. He knew his people. But, they thought, they might try begging. Everybody in the region knew he was a kindly, generous man.

Fearful and trembling, they stood before him in the great room which was lined from one end to the other with bookshelves. It was inconceivable that there should be so many books in the world. This was no mere *bagoszius*, no common money-bags, who was speaking to them, but a friendly, affable man who ran his tongue over his teeth and smiled at them. His eyes, though, were not to be trusted. They read one through and through.

"I won't give you the bricks," he said; "for he

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who builds a house is not a beggar. But I will sell them to you."

Their faces fell. They might just as well have gone to the salesroom in the first place.

"And I will tell you at once what they will cost you."

Jons held tight to his purse and thought, "Maybe we will try to *get* them after all."

At first they did not understand his question, although he spoke Lithuanian nearly as well as they did. He had to repeat it twice. And then how they laughed! He wanted to know if they could sing!

"Can you tell fairy-tales?" he asked.

Tell fairy-tales! They could tell five hundred of them: all day and all night and then again all day and night, they could tell them.

"I don't want that many," he said. "Sing me ten songs and tell me ten stories, and if I find some among them that I don't already know, you may load up your cart with as many bricks as you need.

He poured them a drink of *schnaps* which gave them the courage they needed, and they began. He knew the first three, and stopped them at once. But the fourth was new to him and he wrote it down. And of the fairy-tales which Erdma repeated to him, he wrote down two. Then he gave them a note to his foreman, and thus they had earned their stove and fireplace honestly. The requisite clay had to be pilfered, of course, but the same man's pits would

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deliver that at night without any questions asked. As for the straw, which had to be packed in the fire-wall, that could be cut from the surrounding willow bushes.

And so the wall grew up to the ceiling. The fire-place leant against it on one side, and the stove on the other. The stove was not particularly beautiful. One of glazed Dutch tile would undoubtedly have been much nicer and straighter. In truth, it was not straight at all; but it would give warmth, surely, as soon as the peat chunks crackled in it.

There was still the chimney to be set up, if one was not to suffocate with smoke. The hole in the roof had long been cut. What was to be done about it, though?

"In Schmidt's yard," said Witkuhn, "there is a pile of rusty tins, old oil cans. They cost ten pfennigs each. Buy a dozen of them."

They bought ten and sneaked two. And then what? Witkuhn showed them how to make a square pipe out of strips of tin, and he soldered the pipe so heavily with lead that the smoke could not escape through the chinks. This pipe was shoved up through the hole in the wall and carried so high that it overtopped the rafters. Then a mantelshelf was nailed unevenly below—and the chimney was finished.

Now it had to be tested. But how it smoked! and reeked no less of oil and clay. That would soon drift away. After some hesitation the smoke

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found its exit and escaped upward straight to heaven. If it did as well in winter, they were certain to be warm.

Provided, of course, that the wall and roof did their part. The wall was indeed a difficult piece of work, and without clever Witkuhn it would never have been finished. (How could clever people be so unhappy? He simply waited for Erdma to call him. And he had always to be called.) The squares of swamp growth which one pressed against the board wall held fast as long as they were moist. But when they dried, they fell away like sand. With such laths as were left over, Witkuhn built a second wall, five or six inches outside the first. It was quite fragile and no thicker, say, than a fence. In the space between the two he packed the layers of peat which, having now a support, learned to rely upon themselves. After a couple of weeks, the outer wall could be removed. But by way of precaution, a few laths were left standing. The storms of winter would come, the rain would drive against the house, and the icy cold would be sure to pierce any crevices they allowed to subsist. Such was the warning of clever Witkuhn, who knew and understood everything and who looked past Erdma with his jaw quivering until often his teeth chattered.

Whenever Erdma found herself alone with Witkuhn—and that was nearly every day—she had a feeling of sympathy mingled with curiosity, to which was added something indefinable which she found

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oppressive. It was as if she feared for his fear—for it was quite evident that he was continuously afraid, heaven knows of what! To Jons, however, she said nothing about this. She would keep the kind neighbor for herself.

After the wall came the roof. "Jons, bring in a load of reeds!" Or it might be rushes, or both. The environs were not precisely poor in either, even though the marsh did not itself love them—nor did they love the marsh, which is more to the point. There were many many streams in the region, and all were banked with reeds and rushes. Taruttis' cart had a light load, even though it was heaped high on its return from the banks of the Russ. The guard displayed no curiosity. It went without saying that one took such things wherever they were to be found. In the July heat the reeds dried quickly, so that it was possible to work on the roofing without delay. Taruttis lent his ladder, and straight stalks were nailed down, and Erdma stood now day after day high on the beams, laying out the bundles close to one another, pressing them together and clipping their ends. Below stood little Ulela and handed things up to her as they were needed. No man could serve in that unworthy capacity, even though he be one's own husband. Believe it or not, soon the product of their work began to look like a house. True, there were neither doors nor windows. Incredible, it is, how many things were still lacking.

But whoever took Jons for a blockhead would

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have been mistaken. One day he brought home two window-frames painted bright blue. The glass was still in them, although the panes were broken and the frames charred. The night before there had been a fire in Trackseden. Jons had gone to the owner and said, "I'll stand you to two drams of *schnaps* for this rubbish. You can tell the fire inspector that it disappeared while other things were being saved, and you will get new ones." The suggestion appealed to the insured, and that night he helped Jons break down the frames of the doors still standing and load them on the cart. The difficulty was that they smelled of smoldering fire twenty miles away, and everybody he met laughed, thinking he had stolen them from the wreck of the building. Thus it is possible to earn a bad reputation even in the most honorable traffic.

7

Towards the middle of August a stranger passed through the marsh and down their street. Turning the corner to the left he asked his companion, "Who built that pretty little house?" The companion, who knew everybody in the region, answered, "That was built by the freeman Jons Baltruschat, who came here in the spring with his young wife." And the stranger said, "They must be very worthy, industrious people."

But Heaven forbid that he pass through the sky-blue door, for within everything was in frightful

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disorder. Nothing had been done; nothing. There were wide fissures between the boards, and the knot-holes in the timber had been stopped up with clay, while everywhere protruded the straggly fibers of the moor grass. This disgraceful condition could not last.

First came the floor. Many people lived right on the bare earth of the marsh; but such was not Erdma's way. Fresh clay was brought in under the cover of darkness, and a floor was rolled and pounded and smoothed down fit for a Shrovetide dance. The walls were plastered, and after that came the final touch—pictures, decoration. All the shops in Heydekrug were filled with beautiful pictures glorifying chicory powder, liqueurs, malt extract, corn plasters, and a thousand other useful things, and new posters were always arriving. The old ones were stored on the shelves, and were to be had for the asking. The young clerks produced them willingly and with laughter. Then Erdma remembered that in the lumber room of the Schlopsnies Inn lay piles of newspapers and magazines containing views drawn from the four corners of the earth—Niagara Falls, the Paris Exposition, the Alpine peaks, and many other scenes.

"Dear Frau Schlopsnies, good Frau Schlopsnies! I have been so anxious about you! If I have a little girl I should like her to be named for you." Erdma couldn't for the life of her tell you what Frau Schlopsnies' Christian name was. But the news-

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papers were hers, and she got even the copper engravings which Frau Schlopsnies used to cut out of fashion papers when she was still a waitress determined to rise in the world, and before she had become dowdy and frumpish. They were just as good as new. And if Erdma did actually have daughters they would have to be dressed like all these beautiful ladies who wrung one's heart with envy.

Soon the room was decorated. Picture after picture was pasted to the wall, the gayest being put in the most conspicuous places. In the end there were so many that Niagara Falls had to be thrown away; and the Alps, too, because it was so cold up there. No other home was as beautiful as the Baltruschats'. Of course, Taruttis had his pictures pasted up, but they were only colorless prints from children's books and religious books. And at Witkuhn's hung only the Kaiser and Kaiserin, with Bismarck directly beneath them, whom they had seen in the Steward's office.

Erdma had not yet shown her acquisitions to Witkuhn. The days were rapidly growing shorter, and she did not like to call him from his work. But the ceiling had to be caulked, and for that she needed his help, since Jons did not get home now until it was nearly dark. At first he refused to step inside—he must have been afraid again; but when he saw all the varied colors a smile passed over his quiet face. A smile of pleasure, of course, because it was all so beautiful.

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Erdma's heart was filled with gratitude. "Without you, neighbor," she said, "we could never have done all this"; and she put both hands on his shoulders.

Suddenly he folded up like a pocket-knife, sank down beside the paste-pot, covered his face with his hands, and wept.

"What is it? what is it?" she cried in alarm. In her anxiety to comfort him, she bent down and stroked his back. To her amazement he threw his arms about her hips, kissed her dress, kissed her resisting hands, and tried to draw her down to him.

"No, neighbor, no," she said, with a glance at the paste-pot. "You must not do that."

He answered that if she did not take pity on him he would throw himself into a pond.

"What a shame, neighbor," she said, laughing as she always laughed when she was desired; "what a shame that you didn't know me earlier. As a girl, I wasn't so finicky. First one loved me, and then another. But now that we have to drudge so, Jons and me, I should be ashamed when he got home in the evening. Besides, I may as well tell you that I am expecting a baby now."

Slowly he stood up, and clinging to the wall for support he went out like a man drunk.

She said nothing to Jons of all this, for in her heart she liked their neighbor. She liked him all the more now that she knew him to be so dependent on her. And because she felt that she owed him

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something, she was kind to his wife and helped her as often as she could. This set her behind in her own work, but the hardest things were already done, and Witkuhn's wife could scarcely lift a filled milk-pail. Of course they had no money for a servant.

Witkuhn's wife continued to stare at Erdma with great pleading eyes as if there were something she wanted to say. But despite Erdma's encouragement, she could not get the words out. What was it she wanted to say? From time to time Erdma would think she knew what it was; but what she thought seemed contrary to all nature and religion, so she put the notion quickly out of her mind. Witkuhn, for his part, no longer trusted himself near her. If, coming in from the fields, he heard her voice in his house, he would turn round and go back again. She wanted occasionally to go out to meet him, but that would look as if she were leading him on, and she preferred not to give him that impression.

The house had now reached the point where they could move into it. But there was no furniture. All they had was the bench against the gabled wall which is to be found in every Lithuanian house and had been nailed into place as soon as the house was up. Jons was getting home later and later in the day. He said he was working overtime, but Erdma did not believe him. Winter stood on the threshold, and still there was no bedstead, no table, no chest. She reminded him each day that he ought to begin car-

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pentering, but he merely shook his head. "What are we going to do?" she thought. She was worried, for now she had been carrying Katrika—if it was a girl her name would be Katrika—nearly four months.

Fortunately, the potatoes were thriving. Three times every day she went out to look at them, the way others stare secretly at a hidden treasure to make sure it is still in its place. She would look around first to see that there was no one on the road, and then kneel quickly and paw the earth just as a puppy does with his fore feet; and everywhere a tender bulb seemed to say to her: *labriets*, "Here I am!" They were already as big as walnuts, and in two weeks they would be like Katrika's stout little fists. And thus they grew and grew.

Jons, however, seemed not to care in the least about them. He had no mind nor understanding for anything, and not once did he hand her his weekly wage. He came and went: that was all. Then she began to believe he had a sweetheart in the region and was planning to spend his evenings out, and abandon her to the winter. "If he does that," she thought, "I'll burn down the house and go to live at Witkuhn's."

But one evening after sunset, around Michaelmas, she saw a heavily loaded one-horse cart come down the road. What the load was, she could not say, but up beside the driver sat some one with broad shoulders like Jons', some one who looked like Jons, too, —and it was Jons. The cart stopped before the house

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and seemed about to turn into the marsh. It couldn't do that, of course: the horse was not shod, and he would sink in up to his belly. Hurrying out of doors, what did she see! High on the wagon was a cupboard painted a lovely green, with red and yellow flowers. With it was a green bed, and a table with legs built crosswise. And there was actually—it was hard to tell whether it was the reflection of the setting sun that flashed into one's eyes like needles of fire—there was actually a mirror! Positively, a mirror as bright as gold. Erdma thought she would sink into the ground. And in the marsh this would not be hard to do.

"Is that for us?" she called to Jons.

He laughed as he had not laughed for weeks, and handed down the mirror to her. She must go into the house at once, he said, and tidy her hair quickly, for she looked like a witch, like Ragana herself. And she gazed at the mirror—which reflected nothing in fact, but was still a mirror.

The cupboard was placed in the room at once. But the bed had to be taken apart, for the door was too narrow; and the table could not at first be got in at all. Finally, however, everything was in place, and the carter had been paid his hire. It was a shame that it had by that time grown pitch dark. Even the flowers on the cupboard door were no longer distinguishable. Then Jons said, "Guess what! The best thing is still outside." He went out while she waited for him obediently. She had never believed

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it possible that one could be so submissive to one's own husband.

Suddenly a light flashed around her. What was that Jons held in his hand? A lamp, a real oil lamp, with a glass base and a globe like those in Hoffmann's store. Even in the master's room at the Schlopsnies' there had never been one like this. The lamps there had all been made of tin.

The carter had driven off. Jons stood lost in admiration. But how had all this come about?

Yes, how had it all come about? Well, the wood had come from the sawmill. That was easy; but about the rest? Well, when Kuntze, the cabinet-maker, was buying wood at the lumber yard, Jons asked him what was the best way to get furniture. He had looked around carefully and then explained. "If some one would help him load his wood so that he wouldn't be short any when he got home, he would give the fellow a hand after working hours and show him what to do." Of course Kuntze did not get cheated. Quite the other way round. And by way of compensation, he had let Jons work six weeks in his shop, late into the night. Of course, Jons was out of pocket twenty marks for lamp and kerosene and paint, but now they could move into their own home and live like other decent people.

That is how clever and resourceful Jons was. There would have to be something seriously wrong if two such superior people did not prosper. But they did prosper. The potato crop yielded twenty

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bushels. With that they could feed themselves and a young pig, too. At the gabled end of the house, which had no window, there straightway sprang up an ell with planks for roof and walls made of woven reeds. A pig was housed there, and later a she-goat, of whose milk a woman about to be confined is not willingly deprived. In the summer it would feed itself along the roadside; meanwhile, they had to look after it.

Hay was got by running in the darkness behind the cartloads which came down the highway from the fields—at a slow trot, fortunately, for otherwise Erdma, in her condition, would not have been able to follow. These gleanings were heaped into the accompanying handcart as quickly as possible, for there were plenty of shameless thieves to snatch away the hard-won booty under one's very nose. Sometimes the space behind the carts was already filled by other shadows, and then there were two things to do: either to be knocked about by them, or to work with them in harmony. Gradually the loft was filled with hay, leaving only enough space for fuel. To get fuel, they had been obliged to lease from the Steward the encircling edge of a peat-pool. This rental, like that of the farm, remained unpaid, since if the strange man did not demand payment it would be absurd to offer it.

"But he'll be round for it," said Ulela with a laugh. "It's all written down in a big fat book, just like the Book of Judgment. What everybody got

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honestly, and what they got otherwise. Everything is in it." Erdma's knees shook. Squeaking like a mouse, she fell backwards. But that might easily have been caused by her delicate condition, and on that ground Ulela excused it.

8

Like every other misfortune, winter comes sooner than it is expected. One morning early in November the marsh was frozen as hard as a board. Until then they had lived in the cold, but now they would have to use up their fuel.

Pious Taruttis' handcart, which had been an accomplice in so much impiety, was returned to him and replaced by a cart which Jons had brought home from market. When they wheeled it out the pond was covered with ice. It rocked and rang in their ears on the marsh. The squares of peat which Erdma had herself cut out were stacked in neat piles. Although she had covered them with rushes to safeguard them against the autumn rains, they were not yet dry. But with sufficient encouragement they would burn, and the heavy smoke rose finally through the chimney.

But cooking with peat was another matter. When Jons came home at night he found the room so full of smoke that nothing was visible by the light of the lamp, and Erdma lay on the bed, coughing and exhausted. Little Ulela, however, who was always

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about these days, would laugh and say, "You'll get used to the smoke the way you got used to the water on the ground. Above ground we suffocate, and below it we drown; yet we thrive on it." And she was right; for soon they scarcely knew the smoke was there, if only they kept warm. That was the chief thing.

For there were days so damp and cold that a man's heart froze in his body if he as much as put his nose out of doors. It was hard to tell which was worst: the consuming fogs, the bright frosts, the sweeping snowstorms, or the windless cold. Nowhere else was it so cold as here on the marsh. The icy summits of the Alps were probably nothing by comparison. It was a good thing that the path leading up to the house had been laid out and planted with small birches and ash trees before the first snow fell. Otherwise, when Jons came home late at night he would never have known where to turn in, so enveloped in mist was everything around. Even the little window was often buried deep in snow, which had to be shoveled off in the morning so that one might know the day had come.

Erdma did not go out of doors much. She had only to look after the pig, which was thriving splendidly. If they killed it there would be pork enough for years. But they did not live so sumptuously. They were happy enough to eat a herring now and then. Once the pig was fattened it would be sold to the butcher, and the money they got for it would

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go towards the purchase of a cow. However, a cow was merely a dream of the future. For the present, they were satisfied to have the pig and the goat. In January, the goat moved indoors. Her name was Gertrude. She fed with the pig at its trough and kicked whenever any one tried to milk her. But at last she grew tame and gave her milk as generously as only those can whose maintenance costs nothing.

The worst of this bad weather was to be cooped up all the time. You looked right and left and everything was white, everything was wide and bare, without so much as a team on the road to prove there were still things in the world that were not white. The neighbors' houses were still there, but they were almost altogether hidden beneath the drifts of snow. Only where the smoke escaped were there grey patches on the roofs. It was difficult to conceive that people actually lived in the neighborhood, for no one called and no one received calls. Had it not been for Ulela, the days would have passed without the sound of another voice.

But Ulela had a great deal to do. She was going a-wooing. Her father had to have a wife before she was confirmed in the spring. For thereafter she intended to go out into the world to make her fortune. She knew a woman who had three hundred thalers, and another who had still more; but the second had two children, and their father sometimes came to see them. Ulela thought—quite rightly—that there might be quarrels when she was no longer present

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to mediate in such a situation. Consequently, she had decided upon the first of these two women; but great persuasion had to be exercised, for the woman was afraid she would go the way of her predecessors. One had one's worries, even though one was still a child.

For months Erdma had seen nothing of Witkuhn. Ulela had taken upon her shoulders, among other duties, Erdma's responsibilities towards Witkuhn's wife.

And so there was only kindly Taruttis to whom one could turn. Every Sunday evening there was a prayer-meeting at his house. To these meetings came pietists from far and near. Sometimes the room and the entry were so full that the outer door had to be left open, and then the icy wind beat whip-strokes upon their heads. It was agreeable, however. They sang hymns and confessed their sins, and usually the Holy Ghost inspired one of the assembly to stand up and speak with tongues, while the others listened and wept. That was a very proper form of Sabbath recreation. Jons and Erdma were not members of this sect. Renunciation of this world was not to their taste. They were tolerated as guests, though, because it was thought that the day of their enlightenment could not be far off.

Twice it had thawed, and there had been rains and storms from the west. Then the snow had melted and the world had become a great bog, while the air was filled with the mingled odors of smoke and

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horse-urine, although there were very few horses about, since only the rich could afford them. Jons and Erdma knew that when the time came they would not be without a horse. It might be years and years yet, but they would have it in the end just as they had got the fatted pig which the butcher had long been eyeing.

But first they were to have something else, something that would go clothed in velvet and silk, and for which the son of a constable had long ceased to be good enough. The bridegroom had now to be a great landowner, like the rich gentlemen of the lowlands who had a hundred cows and whose cheese factories were run by steam. Erdma rejected anybody less, even when Jons argued the point. The child would probably arrive towards the middle of March, and here was March practically at their door. The sun bored pockmarks deep into the snow, and when the icicles dripped at noon there was a tinkling sound that was like the music of spring.

One day Witkuhn's wife appeared in the doorway. Miserably she dragged herself into the room. Compared with her, Erdma was still as spry as a weasel. "Neighbor," she said; "I know your hour will soon come, and I have a favor to ask."

"What sort of favor?" asked Erdma.

"Look at me," she said. "For ten years I have crawled about like this. And the farm cannot prosper. If the good Lord knew about me He would take me to Him, so that Witkuhn might look round

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for somebody fitter. But I shall remain a burden to him like this for God knows how long." She wept, and Erdma said the things one says in these circumstances. "Promise me," she went on, "that you will not leave the matter in the hands of a midwife, but will call a doctor from Heydekrug."

"Good heavens!" cried Erdma in alarm. "That would cost ten marks!"

"We've thought of that, too," said her neighbor; "and Witkuhn says that if you are hard up he will give you the ten marks with pleasure."

Erdma flushed hotly, for she remembered what had happened in the early autumn. She said, "Thank your husband, neighbor, but we have the money ourselves. Only, it was being saved up for a cow."

"If the cow dies," said Witkuhn's wife, "you can always lay by money for another. But once you yourself are ruined, saving money will do you no good."

The truth of this was clear to Erdma, and she gave her word. She could do so without misgivings for herself and Jons, too. But she was uncertain about the means of the doctor's conveyance. If he hired a carriage himself, that would cost another ten marks. Witkuhn, however, had provided for this contingency also. He had spoken to one of the well-to-do farmers, who was ready to lend his horse when the time came.

And now the time had come, and Erdma lay and screamed like an animal. For hours one convulsion

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had succeeded another, and her body was rent with travail. Then a German stepped up to her bed. He looked like a red-bearded giant—Perkuhns, the thunder god, must have looked like that—and he stared down at her with the great rolling eyes of a god and said in a voice that thundered and was as kind as a receding storm, "Still refuses to come, does it?"

It wouldn't come. Nor did it, the whole night through. When a convulsion swept over her, she would clasp her knees and pinch herself so hard that it would draw from him a laugh and a cry, "Will you stop doing that?" But she would pinch still harder.

At first when he came in he had been much taller; it seemed to her he had to stoop to stand up in the room. And even now, as he sat on a stool beside the bed, he seemed as large as—oh, perhaps as a horse. Afterwards, though, he appeared to be growing slowly smaller and smaller. With every passing hour of the night he grew smaller. Towards morning she thought all at once, "He won't do it for ten marks." And she began to cry with anxiety and impatience, because it was to cost so much. He thought the pain had returned and had brought tears into her eyes. And when he took her hand soothingly in his, he became very small indeed.

Then suddenly, tilting backwards with his great paunch, he toppled, so that his legs swung around high in the air. She realized in an instant what had

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happened. The layer of clay and marsh soil had been unable to withstand the weight of his heavy body, and the hind legs of the footstool had sunk into the ground beneath him. She began to laugh. She laughed and laughed, but in the midst of her laughter she shrieked, for her body was suddenly rent in two, and . . . and . . . Katrika was there!

Later, as the doctor was about to go, Jons twirled his cap meekly and asked what it would cost.

He looked around the room, saw the bright green cupboard, and the gold-framed mirror, and said, "Well . . . well . . . you seem quite well off, prosperous people. Suppose you give me"—Erdma's heart stood still—"give me three marks."

Erdma thought jubilantly, "If it's as cheap as that I can have another one next spring."

9

Nobody could say with truth that the year which followed was an unfruitful one for Jons and Erdma. The pig was sold at a good price and replaced by a cow. She was the wisest, the most beautifully marked, the most milk-giving cow ever known on earth. Her milk was carried every morning and evening to the coöperative store, and brought in many a useful bit of money. The one drawback was the lack of fodder, for grassy meadows grew on the limeless marsh only after years of cultivation. Usually the colonists were constrained to lease the turf which lay

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in the surrounding region, even that on the other side of the river. Jons set out in search of meadow land, but he found none close enough to permit of his carting home the hay. For good or ill, the Steward was there to be consulted on all such occasions. By way of relieving themselves of an uneasy conscience, they took with them enough money for the payment of their overdue tenancy, and went to call on him.

The Steward looked at them long and intently, opened a large book—surely, the book in which all their sins were recorded—and then looked at them again. Erdma gave Jons a furtive kick, and he thought, "In God's name, now what!" He drew out of his pocket the rent money and put it on the table. "Too bad, the nice money," said Erdma to herself. But when one is stared at in that fashion, what else is there to do? "It was time," said the Steward; and without another word he wrote down something in his book.

Jons was elated by the sudden consciousness of his integrity, and said with dignity, "The rent for the second year will also be paid soon." That, Erdma thought, was certainly unnecessary; but since it was already out, it seemed to her that she too should do the handsome thing, so she added, "We have a hard time of it, but we meet our bills on the dot." The Steward bit his lip as though to repress a snigger. Erdma was greatly annoyed. You never know how you stand with this man!

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He spread out a large map and asked, "How much potato land are you going to work this year?"

"With good luck," answered Erdma, "we'll be able to work half the leasehold."

He shook his head slowly, looked at them again for a moment, and then said, "I've still a small piece of meadow land not too far away, for people who are diligent workers."

"Lord," thought Erdma, "how can human beings bear such luck? He's giving us meadow land, and praise into the bargain."

"And what is more," the Steward went on, "the Government is ready to throw in a few loads of marl when settlers prove that they deserve help."

That was too much for Erdma. She howled hysterically, turned around, and ran straight home. From where he stood, Jons could see her run. When she got home she flung herself down beside little Katrika's cradle and told her the whole story, adding that she would now surely go dressed in silk and velvet.

Jons came home with everything arranged, and only then did it occur to her that the Steward, since he had praised them, could have no inkling of their nocturnal pilferings, and that Ulela must have aroused her fears quite needlessly. Whereupon her self-righteousness was unbounded.

Innocence loves flowers. The garden had to be planted now, or it would be too late for summer

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blooming. There was no money for stakes, but meadow stalks would do. If only they did not keep putting forth green shoots! Every day the young sprouts had to be cut back. Indeed, even the wall between the fireplace and the stove sent forth shoots, because the stalks that grew there seemed to believe they had been packed in the rich loam only in order that they might grow again. Things long dead now wanted to live and thrive: why then should not Jons and Erdma thrive, having life enough for ten?

Sunflowers, mint, scallion and fennel were sown, and rue was planted, and those blossoms that go to make up the bridal wreath. When Katrika married, of course she would gather her wedding garland in her own garden. Landowners' daughters always did; nothing else was seemly. . . .

It was at about this time that Ulela's father married again. The child had been to a great deal of trouble, and not until she had succeeded in convincing her future stepmother that she herself would be very rich one day had she brought her to a final, though still hesitant, decision. The woman was rather pretty, in her late twenties, with a sweet but sickly face. Sitting there in her black German-fashioned dress, with a jet brooch at her throat, she looked as if she had come to celebrate her own funeral. Ulela never left her side, and told her again and again how magnificently everything here was appointed, how distinguished the guests were, and that no better value was ever got for three hundred thalers. Mean-

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while, big Smailus stroked his drooping mustache, looked boldly around, and told everybody what they had long known—that this was his third. Later, when he was drunk, he added that it would not upset him if she were to be followed by a fourth and a fifth. At that point, however, Ulela took him to one side.

Far on in the evening, when many of the guests had left and the deserted young wife was looking longingly at the door, as if wishing to order the horse harnessed again, Ulela drew Erdma aside and said, "I want to go to the city right off, to learn sewing and dressmaking. That is always the first step, for then you can go to night school at the same time. But I see now that I won't be able to leave my stepmother until she has had a child. So just at first I won't go farther than Heydekrug. I'll be able to run over in the evening and talk to her. But do, Erdma, come to see her often. My father doesn't mean any harm, but his manner might easily frighten her."

Erdma promised, thinking to herself, "What with Witkuhn's invalid wife, this makes two. Not counting Katrika." Then she sat down beside the young wife and told her how discouraged she herself had been on coming to the marsh, and that now she would not leave for anything. The wife complained mournfully, "But your husband was young, and he wasn't a widower." To this there was no answer. So Erdma merely kissed her and held her hand.

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Gradually she grew calm and even ate a bit of the thickly-sugared wedding cake.

Witkuhn was there too, without his wife, but he did not speak to Erdma. She had to go over to him and remind him of the recent past. "It was so nice, neighbor," she said. "Do come over again. I have forgotten everything that should be forgotten."

He said, "You are good to my sick wife, and in that way very kind to me. I pray for you morning and night, but I cannot come." She was irritated because she could not have things her way, and resolved to tame him.

As she and Jons were on their way home—she leading Jons, for if he had remained sober it would have been a very poor wedding indeed—she saw darting along the road the shadow which had frightened them with its dancing the year before when, after the house was built, they had sat down to rest and rejoice. She remembered Taruttis' words and thought of the flood, which made her shudder occasionally while she was looking with pride at their farm. How it happened she did not know; she would not have thought it possible; but she did pull out the bit of cake which she had furtively brought away, and handed it to the man, saying meanwhile, "Take it, neighbor, and when you have a wedding, you'll give me some of your cake." He clutched at it like a starving man. Spitting and snorting, he ran quickly away, as if to hide his loot in a safe place.

Yet this virtuous act did nothing to ease her mind.

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She thought he might now feel some claim upon her and insist that she talk to him when they met in the road. And no one talked to him, not even pious old Taruttis. However, she had no reason to worry. He never sought to talk to her, even though at times he passed quite close beside her.

Erdma was very busy. Both child and cow required attention, the one as much as the other; and besides these they had now another little pig. At the same time, it was still very hard for Witkuhn's wife to do the milking, and Smailus' wife had to be made to like the place, else she might run away. For the first time, Erdma realized how fond she was of little Ulela. But in truth it was long since Ulela had been little. On her Sunday visits home she wore a young lady's dress and a flowered hat of straw. She would take her stepmother by the arm and sit down with her in the stubby growth of Scotch fir that was no taller than her father and whose needles stood out like hairs on a mole.

"Ah!" she would say, "how beautiful it is to sit in a green wood like this." Or, "Look at that blessed field!" and she would point to the scrubby potatoes and the barren marsh in which nothing grew except peat moss in coal-black patches. In this way she would succeed in giving the young wife courage till the next week. Finally she said one Sunday to Erdma, "Thank the Lord, now that she is reconciled to life here, things will be easier for her." But she was mistaken about that. Often Erdma had to con-

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sole the unhappy woman when she broke into fits of weeping and declared that she wanted to go home.

Nor were things particularly easy for Erdma. That is to say, she had to do the work of three and never give way, else the farm would run down. Jons had the meadow to look after in addition to his other work. He would take out the cart with him in the morning and haul it back at night, filled with green fodder. Meanwhile, there was the haying, the mowing, the turning and the stacking to be done, and when the rain had wet the hay through, it had to be spread and turned and stacked over again. That he should grow taciturn and answer his wife in monosyllables was easy enough to understand, and if little Katrika had not been in the house there would have been few words spoken. But she laughed and scolded and kicked as long as anybody found time to play with her.

This year there were fifty bushels of potatoes, so that some could even be sold. There was also the milk money, and Jons' wages, and the proceeds from the sale of the pig. The next year they would be able to take on a larger piece of land. The second winter went by like the first, with this difference, that now Erdma had a plaything and Ulela was no longer there to thrust her head in at the door. In April Urta came. She arrived very suddenly and easily. The doctor need scarcely to have been there at all. There were two now, and there would be no more. Erdma had already learned as a girl what precau-

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tions to take. The child had been born in good season, for there was still time to look after the spring planting. Nine days after the birth of Urta, Erdma was standing again up to her knees in icy loam. That's the sort of wench she was.

Smailus' young wife had not got off so easily as Erdma, but her great homesickness had a good deal to do with that. What would she have done without Ulela! The girl had turned up suddenly and served as midwife, taken care of child and mother, and she still found time to read books besides. One day she came to Erdma and said, "Perhaps now I'll be able to get away. If the child doesn't help her, nothing will."

Erdma asked where she meant to go.

"First to Koenigsberg, and then on to Berlin. No small holes for me! These people don't even know what a becoming hat is. And besides, I must go where I can work nights to learn typing and that swift writing they call stenography. Later, I shall have to go to the country, I mean to a large estate, where I can learn farm management. After I have learned that perfectly, I shall go into a large grain business and make myself indispensable. Then maybe the head of the firm will marry me when he sees that the business can't do without me. But as a matter of fact, I don't really think that, because men have never looked at me."

"You are still very young," Erdma reminded her.

"That's true," she said. "I have no breasts yet.

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Perhaps I never shall have. I always used to think that men would help me to get on in life, but I must put that idea out of my head. Even so, I shall get on all right."

Erdma laughed, and said, "You, a fifteen-year-old kid: what great things do you expect?"

"Everybody I know has love," came the reply; "only I am wanted by nobody."

Erdma, who had formerly been envious of the determined child, looked at the cradle in which Katrika and Urta lay side by side, with pacifiers in their mouths, and thought, "You'll not be like her, for you have my blood in you." Ulela seemed to understand, for she sighed and said, "Yes, if only I could be like you."

"What do you mean by that?" Erdma asked sharply. "Do you know anything about me?"

"Not exactly," admitted Ulela, "but . . . but . . ." She hesitated, tried again, but could not bring herself to speak. Finally, as she stood in the doorway, she turned and said, "Of course it isn't an express order, for she would not dare send you one. But she does want you to know."

"Who? What?" asked Erdma in complete astonishment.

Well, Witkuhn's wife had spoken to Ulela as if she had been a grown woman. Her husband's grief wrung her heart. Whenever he was out of her sight she worried lest he commit suicide. Was there no hope that Erdma might take pity on him?

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Erdma was startled. When one's wife sins thus against nature and religion, things must be very bad indeed. "Why must it be me?" she asked. "There are plenty of girls running loose over the marsh who would be glad to do him a favor."

Ulela turned up her nose. "That's just it," she said. "At first anybody would have done. But whenever a girl came near him he jumped back. When I was even more ignorant than I am now, and didn't know just why, I used to want to sit in his lap from time to time; but he always threw me off as if I was something out of hell. Now he has his mind set only on you. I don't understand much about it, but it does seem that if Jons were not to find out anything, you might show him a little sympathy."

Erdma felt herself tingling from head to foot. "You're quite right to say you are ignorant about these things," she said, and shoved Ulela out of doors without a word of farewell.

But she could no longer dismiss her neighbor from her mind. She kept thinking, while Jons sat opposite her, mute and heavy with fatigue as usual, "Should I, or should I not?" And her decisive answer was always, "No, I should not." When, however, she saw Witkuhn at work in a distant field, and pictured to herself his calm, sensitive face with its quivering cheekbones, she thought again, "Yes, I should." Her sympathy for him was so great that she dreamed of him by night, while by day she sat

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on the edge of the ditch and gazed in his direction. Naturally, her work suffered. Finally she said to herself, "Come what may, something must be done about this," and she found the courage to go over to him.

When he saw her coming towards him, the spade fell from his hand. He stared at her as if she had been an apparition from heaven; although he knew her to be flesh and blood, he could not believe his eyes.

"Neighbor," she said, as if it were only yesterday she had last spoken to him; "won't you come and take a look at our cow? She won't eat."

He drew on his boots over his bare feet and went with her. He ran his hand over the cow's belly, looked at her mouth, and pulled back the skin all around her eyes. "The cow is sound," he said. Not another word.

Erdma was embarrassed and felt herself trembling. But she knew that this moment would not come again, and asked him into the house.

"What am I to do there?" he wanted to know.

"I have wanted for a long time to talk to you," she said.

He drew off his boots and went into the room. She had been careful to set the children's cradle out in the yard, so that they might not see what went on.

Erdma and Witkuhn stood indoors, trembling.

"Neighbor," she said, "I cannot help thinking of what happened two years ago, and it seems to me

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I have done you an injustice. If I can repair it, I will do so gladly."

"There is nothing to repair," he answered, and turned his attention to the pictures.

"Sit down on the bench," she said. He did as he was told, and she sat down beside him. More, she could scarcely do.

"Neighbor," she said, "you are very strange with people. Not only with me. Something must have happened to you. The best thing would be to tell me all about it."

"Very well," he said, "I will."

And then he told her the story of his youth. He had been a happy lad, the son of a landowner, well thought of and well liked. Many girls were ready to have him either as husband or as lover. There was one in particular who was wild and secretive at the same time. As wild as the wildest. Yet she couldn't be secretive enough, despite her abandon. One night they met in the shadow of a clump of bushes on the heath where no one ever came. She was ready of her own will to do his pleasure. Suddenly a group of hunters who had been out night-shooting flashed lights upon them. And the girl began to scream that he was assaulting her. She screamed as if she was being jabbed with a spear. And thus he got into trouble. The story followed him from place to place, and was always revived when he needed a testimonial or had to appear as witness in court. In the end he took refuge in this

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marsh where condemned men are still able to live without molestation. The Steward knew his story, and his wife knew it; but no one else. He had sought peace in his wife, but for a long time now she had been no wife to him. And as soon as another woman smiled at him he thought at once, "She will scream." Continually, he heard that cry in his ears. And when he heard it his face quivered as it had begun to quiver on the night he had allowed himself to be led away dumbly without defense. He was still as sensitive as he had been then.

"How did you dare lay hands on me, then?" asked Erdma with a smile.

"I don't know that myself," he answered, and stroked his face with his hand.

"Well, I didn't scream," she went on, still smiling provocatively at him.

"But you sent me away, and since then it has been worse than ever."

Should she say now, "I shan't send you away today"? No, she could not say that. No woman could speak so plainly. But she stroked his arm and said, "Poor neighbor!"

She thought that now he would embrace her, but he did not. Trembling, he turned from her and groaned, "Leave me alone. Nothing helps me now."

"God will help you," she said, the way one says "good-by," or "good luck."

"Not even God will help me," he sobbed, wringing

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his hands. "I have prayed to Him day and night to take this great passion from me. But He does not help me."

"I will pray for you," she said. She would much rather have sinned, but there are times when one must compromise.

In his pain he grasped at the thought as a starving man runs towards a bone which has been flung out of a window. "Yes, pray for me. Pray for me. Or if you will do me a great boon, let us pray together. Perhaps God will hear then."

And God heard! She brought forth two hymn books. They opened them, and prayed and prayed. And behold, Erdma was filled more and more with a feeling of virtue. She thought of the sleeping children outside, and of her husband who struggled from morning to night, and after a bit she no longer understood how she could have wished to commit so great a sin. When they had prayed for half an hour she said, "Well, neighbor, do you feel that it helped?"

He shook his head and said nothing. To herself she said, "But it has helped me." And then, quite sincerely, she talked to him gently, saying that she would like to do as he asked, but it was impossible. The children were still so small, and Jons was so fond of them all—even if it was true that he did not quite know how to express his affection. Later, perhaps, it would be different, and she would then have reason to feel no shame. Possibly Jons would begin

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to drink and beat her, or something of the sort. If he did, she would feel no remorse in the matter.

Witkuhn stood up, reached for his hat, and said as he left, "Then I shall wait."

She thought, "Too bad! But who knows what good it might do?"

10

The flood, when it comes, must be endured.

Yard and garden lay under water, and the wooden path to the highway was in many places impassible. It was already plain that the clay floor would have to be done over again. But after all, one did not live on the marsh for pleasure, and all this would pass. Eventually the roads dried off, boards were laid over the yard and the ditches, and the floor was rolled and pounded smooth again. So March returned for the second time, and Erdma thought no more of the fearful and gloomy prophecy with which the old murderer had poisoned her early hope. She asked questions occasionally of her neighbors, but they seemed to prefer not to talk of floods, so she dropped the subject. . . .

They were now in their fourth year on the marsh, and it was clear that they could afford to think about improving their condition. The meadow produced enough hay to feed a second cow, so that a barn had to be built. The outhouse at the gabled end was cramped and insecure, for the fattened pig gnawed at the supports and brought down the roof upon the

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cow's back. They had saved money, but they were not sure it was enough, particularly since they were about to lease a second plot of two and one-half acres from the Steward. It occurred to them that they might try borrowing from the Provident Society. So, one Sunday afternoon in early April, after putting up the lamps and hiding the matches, they locked the children in and went to call on the Steward.

He heard them in silence, and then opened a large book. Oh, that terrible book! The longer he read in it, the more Erdma's legs shook, for Ulela had once said—but Erdma did not dare recall what Ulela had said. Then he looked at them steadily, exactly as he had done before, and finally he spoke. "So," he said, "everything is going well with you."

Now I should like to know the farmer, Lithuanian or German, peasant or baron, who would answer such a question with a simple "yes." Together they began to complain with all their might. The night frosts of the previous summer; the scrofulous potatoes; the children who required so much attention; and the very recent flood!

"What do you know of floods!" he said, and a bitter, almost despondent smile passed fleetingly over his strong face. "At any rate," he went on, "you are getting on well enough to undertake to enlarge your farm considerably. I am not surprised, for of course I have kept my eye on you. You shall have your second plot, and I will even endorse your application for a loan. Only," he hesitated, and looked

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at them long again, "only it seems to me there are a few things to be settled that date back to your house-building days."

Jons and Erdma exchanged a furtive glance. What could he mean?

He continued to stare at them with his piercing eyes, as if they were standing naked before him. "Good Lord, good Lord!" thought Erdma. What was it Ulela had said? And then she remembered the promise Jons and she had made to each other on the night of their wedding as they sat in the ditch along the Matzick road. How soon it had been forgotten!

"You don't appear to know what I mean," the Steward said. "Go home and think it over. If you find I am wrong, come back. But not before."

They had come to him in pride and hopefulness of spirit. They left in silence and with bowed heads.

"God alone is omniscient," thought Erdma.

"Only one thing can help," said Jons at length. "We must join the Believers."

"Why?" asked Erdma. "We are religious enough already."

"If we join them," said Jons, "we can confess our sins and be absolved without inconvenience."

"If it's as easy as that," Erdma returned, "why make much of a confession?"

"That would be wrong," Jons said.

In the end they decided to consult old Taruttis

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to find out whether it was worth their while to apply for admission into the circle of the Enlightened. The pious old man received them with joy.

"I have often prayed that you might find the way to salvation, and now my prayer is answered," he said. He looked as gentle and spiritual as a messenger of the Lord, and his eyes glowed like two luminous stars. He called in Taruttena, who set before them a kind of cottage cheese. She, who had now grown shriveled and withered, wanted to sing at once; in fact, she could hardly restrain herself. But her husband silenced her. There would be time enough for that, he reminded her, at the next meeting. First a confession sheet had to be filled out. Then, when public confession was made, the entire community would kneel and pray to God to forgive them. That had always helped.

Jons and Erdma stared at one another. They had often participated in these prayer-meetings, but now they could not help thinking that it was going to be immensely difficult for them.

Taruttis brought forth a sheet of paper and looked at them expectantly. At this point Erdma said, "If the confession is to be complete, we must confer in private. Otherwise, we might omit something, and if we did we should never forgive ourselves."

Old Taruttis praised their earnestness and sincerity, and asked them to attend the next meeting. Then they went home.

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"No!" said Erdma. "People will point their fingers at us and say, 'That is stolen goods.' I won't have it."

Jons suggested timidly that they might make the confession so ambiguous—it would be easy, since there were two of them—that no one would really understand. But Erdma was adamant. "Our children must go dressed in velvet and silk," she said. "We must think of them."

Meanwhile, they wrote out the list. The man from whom they had filched the potato seed was first, and after him came many others. Individual instances offered difficulties. To whom, for example, should compensation be paid for the goat's hay which had been pulled from the carts under cover of darkness? And whom had Jons injured when he made the secret trade for the doors and windows with the man whose house had burned down? Nobody had any notion, of course, just what an insurance company was. And then, worst of all was the pilfering in the lumber yard where Jons still worked. The cabinet-maker had not been the only one to connive. Many another, to whom approach was easy, had allowed extra boards to be loaded into his wagon, and the inspector had regularly been reprimanded for the loss. Bad business, bad business.

Nevertheless, they went through with the job. Jons brought home money orders and note paper, and they wrote letter after letter, exactly as if they actually intended to join the Enlightened. This

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was astuteness on their part, for they knew their confessions would be received by the Germans with laughter and by the Lithuanians with scorn, and that then the matter would be dropped. In dubious cases, however, they were careful not to sign the letters. One of them went this way:

"Dear Mr. Hahn: Now I have found Jesus and he has saved me from my sins. The spirit of the Lord has revealed my wrongdoing to me. To make a settlement with God and man I must purify myself as the Lord Jesus was pure. The Lord reveals to me that I did you an injury while my house was being built. I stole timber from your forest. I beg to be forgiven for the sin so that it may not rise up to accuse me before the Throne of God. I enclose thirty marks to pay for the cost of the stolen timber. God Himself is Judge and points out the way. He has told my conscience that this is the right amount. Once more I beg your forgiveness and condonation of the sin that I may be at peace with God and not have an accusing conscience. The Lord Jesus already forgave me when he cried out on Golgotha, It is Fulfilled. Respectfully, J. Baltruschat."

Another read:

"Dear Sir: Entering a new period of my life in which I wish to reconcile myself with God, I found among the condemned actions that I had also offended against you. I used to believe it was no sin to steal little things from a rich man. Therefore I come to you asking you to forgive me. If you will

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be so kind. A long time ago when I built my house I was in great trouble. So I went out and brought in gravel from your pit as God willed. For this I send you ten marks. If possible please forgive my offense. Respectfully, A Neighbor."

These two letters, the devout and the more mundane, they took as models for the others, and they wrote many letters, computing in each case their debts to the addressees. Jons went to the man who had been burned out, in an effort to learn how he might make good his sin. This man was living in a new house with doors and windows a thousand times better than those he had cast aside. At first he laughed heartily when he heard the story, but when Jons told him he intended to join the Enlightened, he realized the matter was serious and gave Jons the most precise information possible. In the end there remained only the business of the lumber, for the goat's hay was an idle thing. But, the lumber!

"That German swine may get wind of it and put you out," Erdma warned Jons. "Even without a signature, he might smell you out." Jons saw the truth of this, and in order to be on the safe side he signed the name of another workman who had recently gone into the log-cutting country in Russia and who, like himself, had been in the habit of stealing lumber. He felt now that he was purifying the conscience of the other man and being doubly virtuous.

After they had despatched the letters and money

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orders they were in high spirits. Their savings had diminished greatly, it was true; but they were repaid for this by the knowledge that now the Steward would be willing to help them. Meanwhile they had quite forgotten that they were to place their confession before the next meeting of the Enlightened.

Sunday afternoon came. They sat happily before their door. Jons was smoking his pipe and Erdma was breathing in the aroma of a daisy. The children were playing close by. Of a sudden they heard the strains of an anthem. "It must be a funeral," thought Erdma. But the singing came nearer and nearer, and what did they finally see! Taruttis and two other worshipers were walking straight through the potato patch to their door. Each held his hymn-book in one hand and his handkerchief in the other, and none wore hats. What were they to do? They could not run away, and they had no excuse to turn these people off.

In his embarrassment, Jons welcomed them with an invitation to a nip of *schnaps*, although he knew of course that the Enlightened never drank spirituous liquor. Taruttis pretended not to hear, and said, "Dear brother and sister, the hour of benediction has come. The gates of the celestial city are open. Follow us to Jerusalem, where straightway you will sit in white robes at the right hand of the Lord."

Jons, who was stunned into acquiescence, was ready to go with them at once. But Erdma held his arm and drew him back.

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"Dear neighbor, and you other honored guests," she said with an almost evangelical expression, "since we announced our decision we have searched our hearts, but we have found no sin at all. We were ashamed to appear so righteous before you, where each one displays his sins. So we ask you to give us time, a month or a year, or even longer, in which to collect a good list of sins. Perhaps in the meantime we shall commit new sins, but we shall know that we are already absolved."

Taruttis was not so entirely simple-minded as to be unable to see that this impertinent person was making him appear ridiculous.

"Why did you come to me, then?" he asked indignantly.

"You came to us as much as we to you," she answered.

The good men were nonplussed and went away, Jons accompanying them as far as the ditch at the end of their property, where boards had been carefully laid. When he returned he found Erdma fondling the two children in her arms. She put them into their cradle, shook both fists at the departed Christians, and called out in a loud voice:

"Your only blessing would be to ruin the marriage of my daughters, you scoundrels!"

Jons was almost frightened. He would never have believed that his wife could be so wicked.

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II

Something very like peace seemed to have settled down upon their neighbor Witkuhn. He no longer avoided Erdma, but remained quietly at home when she came in to help his invalid wife, and he went to her house as often as was necessary. Without him the barn would not have been finished. It was much more splendid than the house, with space enough for two cows and two pigs, and even—Heaven preserve us from pride!—even for the horse that was to come. Witkuhn knew that he himself would never be so prosperous; and it was therefore with redoubled zeal that he dedicated himself to the success of Jons and Erdma. It was he who undertook the purchase of their second cow, a Dutch beast with a forehead like wool, and one black and one white eye. And what milk she gave! It would shame me to say how much, but at the creamery they well knew. There was butter on the table at night now, and the children had all the fresh milk they could drink.

In the spring of the fifth year occurred something of great importance: Jons gave up his job at the sawmill. Work on the place had grown too much for Erdma, despite the help he lent in his free hours. As a farewell gift the mill owner handed Jons ten marks and a box of cigars. This was because of his honesty, which the owner contrasted in his mind with the thieving of those who were now somewhere in Russia. And so they could take over the third plot

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of two and one-half acres. The earlier they plowed it, the sooner it could be sown to rye. Another bit of pasturage was allotted by the Steward, who went so far as to promise Jons work on the drainage crews when things became quiet at the farm. The future lay before them as smooth as a field of clover in bloom.

When Erdma, at her work, lifted and set down again her slime-bespattered legs and the soft earth rocked like a cradle; when the black root splintered under the stroke of her spade as if it were powdered peat, then she felt that the whole marsh had been created merely to serve her good. And with this sense of well-being, she poised her strong body to meet success.

If only the others had got along as well as she and Jons! But everywhere about them was hardship. It was not only Witkuhn's infirm wife, who might be expected to drag on hopelessly for years. There was also the wife of Smailus. She had a swift, lively body, but she seemed even more sick in spirit than the other woman. She went about in a sort of dream, answering absent-mindedly the questions put to her. And her breast had no milk for the children.

"I've known a long time what is the matter with her," Witkuhn said. "The swamp sickness has got her."

Erdma asked what that was, and he answered, "The swamp sickness seems to come from a poison that rises up out of the ground. No one knows what

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it is, and no doctor has been able to deal with it. It is there, and it isn't there. Some it lays out cold, and others inhale it as a tonic. And if it takes you the wrong way there is only one thing to do, and that is to get off the marsh in a hurry, without stopping to look back. But most people don't realize it until too late."

Erdma kept the promise she had made Ulela. She helped the dispirited woman as well as she could. Smailus' wife got her work done well enough. But on Sundays, or after the day's work—for now Jons and Erdma sometimes took an hour or so to themselves—Erdma would go to see her, put an arm over her shoulder, and say, "Come, neighbor, let us talk together." She would lead her high up on the sandy point into a copse of pine where the poor woman liked best to sit, because it reminded her of the heath on which she had spent her youth. There she would sigh and weep, "Oh, my heath, my native heath!"

Erdma knew just how to talk to her and depreciate her heath. "My home was on a heath, too," she would say. "It is just as bad there as it is here. You can't raise rye in the sand, and the oats look consumptive. And the pines, well, of course they grow higher; but they give no shade there either. And it is easier to get ahead here."

"But when the heather blooms," the woman would say, looking into the distance with longing, "and everything is aglow with flowers, and the bumblebees hum and the air is warm, you lie in the shade of

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a bush as happy as if you were in heaven! While here it is cold even in August, and the earth keeps sinking under you. For four weeks I have been watching our fireplace sinking, sinking right before my very eyes."

And Erdma would say to comfort her, "Then it was too heavy in the first place. You will have to build a stronger foundation." Then, to cheer her, she would tell her the story of the red-bearded doctor who grew smaller and smaller because the legs of the footstool on which he sat were sinking into the ground. She would certainly not have told this story if she had suspected how it would be received. The next time they met, Smailus' wife said to her, "Believe it or not: I can't sleep at night for thinking that the legs of my bed are sinking under me and that the whole bed and me in it will sink into the ground."

Sympathizing with the poor woman, Erdma thought suddenly of what Witkuhn had said was her only salvation, and she resolved to implant gradually into the tormented woman's mind the notion of going away. Was Smailus good to her? she asked. She could not complain: he never beat her, he didn't drink, but—and here she put her mouth close to Erdma's ear—"but he is already waiting."

"Waiting for what?" asked Erdma.

She opened her eyes very wide in an expression of real anguish, and whispered very softly her great secret: "Waiting for the fourth."

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"How do you know that?"

She didn't know it, but she felt it.

Erdma's confidence grew. "You can help him, then," she said.

"In what way?"

"By not waiting until you are taken out to be buried. You will then be clear of the marsh and can return to health."

"And what about the children?"

The children, of course: as though a mother had any other thought.

"You will take them with you."

"And then what?"

Truly, "and then what?" The three hundred thalers she had brought as dower had already gone into the farm. Her brother had long been the father of a family. If she went to him now, without a copper and with a child clinging to either hand, he would turn her away. She could go begging.

To herself Erdma said, "If her heart had not long been broken she could pull through." As it was, Witkuhn's words were terribly true. She was one of the majority for whom it was already too late. And Erdma ceased to urge her, thinking only, "I shall be kind to her until she dies." And she truly was. The woman's lungs became infected, and she grew weaker and weaker. Only when the sole road in sight was the one leading to the graveyard did she begin to hope and make plans. Smailus would sell out; surely he would do it for her sake (he was

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that kind of man). Then they would move to the heath of her homeland and lie under the warm, dry bushes where she would sleep and sleep, sleep away all fear and fatigue. And she did, shortly after, drop off to sleep. But it was two years coming, that sleep.

At about twelve o'clock on the night after she died there was a knock on the Baltruschats' door. They dressed, went out, and saw Smailus standing there, weeping copiously. It was very gloomy at home, he said, and would they let him stay with them until morning.

"Serves you right, neighbor," said Erdma. "First you couldn't wait till she died, and now you are sorry for yourself."

"It isn't sorrow that makes me cry," he answered. "A man can't live without a wife. Who is to feed the hogs and the cow, now that she is gone?"

"I thought you had been feeding them yourself," said Erdma.

"That's true; but still she was there," he said.

He sat down at their table and drank off one *schnaps* after another, until he became loquacious—if that is not too much to say of Smailus. "I shouldn't complain," he said; "for as the proverb goes, 'Lucky the man whose horses live and wives die.' I haven't a horse, but my third wife has now died; so I am still in luck. But that's easily said. Where am I going to find a fourth wife?"

"Time enough for that," Erdma said soothingly. "Wait until the third is under the sod."

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"No," he protested; "there is no time to lose. I'll mourn as long as is decent, of course; but I've got to look round. And it won't be easy to find another like my third: such a gentle disposition and three hundred thalers. Ulela found her for me. But where is Ulela now?"

"We can reach Ulela," said Erdma. "Only the other day she sent some tonic wine and sardines."

Ulela had sent many other toothsome things, but it was the sardines in oil that Erdma best remembered, for they reminded her of the splendor of her girlhood. She suggested that they telegraph to Ulela. Berlin was indeed far away, but even so she might come.

"What do you have to pay for a telegram?" Smailus wanted to know. And would he be expected to pay for the railway ticket too?

Erdma reassured him. She would advance the money for the telegram, and Ulela could reimburse her. As for the ticket, he might be sure that was more than he could possibly pay. Smailus agreed then, and showed them an envelope with Ulela's address on it. But she was no longer Ulela: she was Adele.

Two days later she stepped down at the Heydekrug station from a red-cushioned carriage, a veritable lady. In all Heydekrug there was not such a lady: all in black, with a long veil, and another, and still another veil. Never in her life had Erdma seen so many veils. She dared not go forward to greet

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her, although she was driving the buggy that was to take Smailus' daughter home. Ulela had first to move forward and throw her arms about Erdma, something she did before a crowd of people without the least shame.

From that moment Erdma was indifferent to everything. She forgot her neighbor's dead wife, forgot the coffin, forgot the funeral for which she had been entirely responsible, since Smailus was like a helpless child: she saw only Ulela. Here was the incarnation of everything she had dreamed and had not been; the image, the model, of all the beautiful girls in the fashion sketches which adorned the walls of her house; the finest, the highest type of womanhood in or upon the earth; Milda, the goddess of love; Laima, the goddess of happiness—all these were Ulela and Ulela was all these. No daughter of a king, no grand waitress, could ever have been as beautiful as Ulela. And she even spoke Lithuanian! No one had ever heard a lady speak Lithuanian. Hers was somewhat halting, but it was Lithuanian, nevertheless. She inquired about everything: "Where is father? Who is making the coffin? Whose cart will bring my trunk and wreath?" She had brought a wreath of thirty lilies, although it was still winter. She wanted to go at once to the carpenter, Wedermann, to see about the coffin. And to Steil's butcher shop and the Schmidt distillery, to attend to the preparations for the funeral feast. She

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gave orders, threw down money, and everything was done as she commanded. That was Ulela.

But she was not really proud. Before the funeral guests arrived she put aside all her veils, and when she stood in her long black dress in the Szibben cemetery, she looked not unlike a German woman. When Erdma asked her why she had done this she said, "I was a stupid fool. I wanted you all to admire me, so I bought all that finery. But now I am very much ashamed before your poverty." And she stroked the yellow, knotted hand of her who lay in the coffin, saying, "I still have her on my conscience."

"Why?" asked Erdma.

"She never wanted to marry father, and came here only because I talked her into it."

During the funeral she held the children on her lap and wiped their noses, but she took care also that, in his grief, their father did not go off and drink too much. And to each of the guests she gave a cake of soap.

She stayed one week after the funeral, but was rarely to be seen. When Erdma asked where she was keeping herself, she answered, "I have to see about finding the children a mother." On the evening before she left she came to sit in Erdma's house.

"I think things will now get on without me," she said. "I have found a woman from Pagrienen who knows all about life on the marsh. She has some money, too, and I am putting up the rest. But my

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father must not know that: he must be properly respectful of her."

Erdma looked at her admiringly. "Are you very rich, then?"

Ulela smiled. "I am really much poorer than she is; but with you money has a different value." And then she told Erdma her whole story. She had fashioned her life exactly as she had planned. She had learned economics, bookkeeping, and management, and now at twenty she was the business manager of a soap factory. The fact that it was a soap factory and not a grain business as she had once intended was of no importance.

"And is 'he' going to marry you?" asked Erdma, who remembered every word.

Ulela wet her forefinger and smoothed her eyebrows. She often did that when she was reflecting. "That isn't as easy as you might think," she said with a smile. "Usually there is already a wife; and if she receives you in her home, and is otherwise kind to you, you are satisfied to have 'him' call on you occasionally and stay until midnight. Then you send him home, so that the wife will suspect nothing."

"But of course he gives you what you want," Erdma insisted with glowing eyes.

"He gives me what I want," Ulela admitted; "but it must not be very much, or others will think I am living loosely."

Erdma could not quite grasp that. She would

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have taken everything, snatched unremittingly and without scruple. That went without saying.

"And then there is the head bookkeeper," Ulela went on, "who is trying to marry me. Of course he doesn't suspect anything, nor does any one else. People are very stupid. The question is: shall I try to induce 'him' to take the other in as partner, or shall I start my own business with the bookkeeper? The first would be better, for then I could stay at the soap factory. But to have two husbands from the very beginning is too much for me. And murder will out, and the bubble burst. Yet, I think I may do it, for I love the factory as if it were my child."

"Then you did find fortune through the favor of men after all," Erdma said with pride.

Ulela shook her head. "There is another side to the story," she said. "I am still thin, and even to-day I haven't any breasts. And when 'he' is with me we talk a good deal more about business than about love. I did it by hard work and forethought. But of course men have helped matters along. Otherwise one couldn't exist."

When she left she kissed Erdma and the children and gave each of them a cake of soap which smelled even sweeter than those she had distributed at the funeral.

The same evening, after Erdma had put the children to bed, she knelt at the foot of their cribs and swore by the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost that they should be as fine and as distinguished as

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Ulela who was now called Adele. And they should find fortune through the favor of men.

12

Nothing has yet been said about Katrika and Urta. For some time they had been grown girls, going to school and learning to speak German splendidly. Erdma never spoke anything but German with them, for they were to go out into the world where men do not even know of the existence of a Lithuanian language. She was insistent that they learn to pronounce the German "h"; and when they had finally mastered it they confused edge and hedge, and said "the 'en 'as laid two heggs," until Erdma herself sometimes could not tell the difference.

Day after day she drummed into them the idea that they were meant for something better than to soil their legs in the marsh slime, for the swamp wrinkled and furrowed the skin. Therefore they worked in the potato field only when time was very short and their help absolutely essential. She preferred to send them into the meadow where they could lie on the hay cocks and watch the flight of the swallows to their hearts' content. Like the swallows, they would fly off one day, but they would not return to the nest. That would not be to their advantage.

The two girls enjoyed their freedom to the utmost. They wandered far and wide over the marsh,

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and every summer discovered new domains. The stranger exploring such a barren waste would find it difficult to believe that there was much to be discovered. There was, for example, a clump of birches—from a distance it seemed no more than that. But on closer inspection it proved to be filled with secret wonders. Whortleberries grew there. They were poisonous, but the girls ate them nevertheless, for they were sweeter than the blueberries they resembled, and they confused the senses so that one soon grew dizzy and fell asleep. The hardy rosemary of the marsh, too, put forth shrubbery in which one could hide even better than in the tickling hay. Then there were glades, and ponds. Not the square ponds with the coal-black edges, artificially born of peat-cutting. These ponds had existed since the beginning of time; they struck the eye at a distance like hidden mirrors revolving in sunlight. To reach them was difficult, however. You had to jump from mound to mound if you were not to sink into the slime—and if that happened, what chance had you of being pulled out? But the pleasure beside those ponds! All about them was an undergrowth of needles like clusters of serpents twined together. Your own terror was thrilling here. And there was something even more beautiful—the turf which grew down to the water's edge, and upon which it was even more fun to roll than among the birches. You had to be on the watch, however, and be spry; for the turf had a habit of

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moving off into the water, and if you went with it you were sure to drown. The edges of these ponds were always treacherous; you never knew when they might suddenly give way and the water rise up about you, and if it did, whether you would escape alive.

But all this was not really important. They hadn't been caught yet, and it was not likely that the marsh would do injury to two of its own offspring,—which was as it should be.

Winter, though, was bad, for on your way to school the cold bit through your mittens as if they were sheer linen; and your feet froze crossing the Schlorren so that your mother had to rub them with turpentine, which burned like fire. And even worse was the snowstorm when you held your hands over your eyes to keep from being blinded and walked out of your course and didn't know it until suddenly you were up to your shoulders in snow. This was when Katrika and Urta begged to stay home as other children did to whose parents such a journey seemed hazardous. But however indulgent their mother might be in other respects, on this point she was obdurate. "They must go to school," she would say; "for farmers' daughters must learn if ever they are to rise in the world."

That they were the daughters of landowners was dinned into their ears morning, noon, and night, and on all occasions. No princesses could more often have been reminded of their superiority of birth. They had long known that one day they would go in

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velvet and silk, and already they wore with something of an air the poor clothes which were good enough for school. They liked their Sunday dresses, though: bright calico from Hoffmann's shop, trimmed with white lace that cost three pfennigs a yard. And they wore polished shoes, and clocked stockings which their mother had knitted herself.

Their father let things go on their easy way. It was only when their help was needed and Erdma denied it, that he put his foot firmly down. Then she had to give in, for fear that his displeasure might grow extreme. They knew little of their father. For the most part he sat huddled over at night on the bench beside the stove. At table with them, he was always bowed over a sheet of paper, busy with his calculation. He had a great deal of calculation to do, and a great deal of work. The fourth plot had already been leased, and thus their highest station in the community attained. The horse had been bought, and now he drew potatoes to market and fodder from the field. He was a brown, bristly nag with spavined legs and a lank rump; but they had paid eighty thalers for him and he was willing to earn it. Though he was fourteen years old his gait was still lively, and if they had owned a carriage in addition to their cart they might have been privileged to drive out among ladies and gentlemen.

Such opulence was not yet for them. They saved, penny upon penny, and carried their coppers to the savings bank. The beggar's hut in which they lived

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would some day have to be torn down and another built in its place,—a house such as owners of large estates live in, with a bedroom, a lumber room, a porcelain stove, and a wooden floor to walk upon. The best course would be to insure the hut for all it was worth and then set fire to it. But for the sake of appearances they would let two or three years elapse between the insurance and the fire: otherwise it was quite likely that the State prosecutor would be after them. Yet insurance could be taken out at once, since there was after all the barn and the cattle which thrived handsomely and brought such prices in market as they had never dreamed of.

How lovely the world was when once one made one's way in it, and God quite unmistakably stretched forth His hand to guard one's home and family! It was easy to be happy, and to go to church was a pleasure, because people already looked up and said, "That is Jons Baltruschat with his wife and daughters. He began with nothing, and now he gets honorable mention for his fatted cows."

It was true that Taruttis was unfriendly. He came no longer to their house, and they never went to his. One day Erdma said, "I must take the children to see him, so that he may know who we really are." She dressed them carefully, set combs in their hair, tied bows at their collars, and took them to Taruttis. He was now an old man, and when they came in Taruttena was feeding him. "Neighbor," said

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Erdma, "when we were young and poor you sheltered us. Now we are getting on very well, and the children have come to give you our thanks." Urta, who was already twelve, kissed his hand. Katrika did not want to, but had to.

With the passing years pious Taruttis had grown vague and meditative. He was forced to think for a bit in order to remember who they were; and then he said suddenly, "Yes, yes. Yes, yes. Man is born evil and is filled with evil intentions. Revenge does not help, nor humility, nor prayer. Therefore he should chastise himself, scourge himself, and bow his head in the dust before his God."

Erdma was offended and said, "If I had known you bore us a grudge so long, neighbor, I should not have come."

Taruttis did not understand her immediately, and resumed his meditation. Then he said, "It seems to me, neighbor, that you are taking to heart words which were meant to apply only to me."

"In what way?" asked Erdma, surprised.

"One day you greeted me and my friends with insults. I stored up bitterness in my heart against you, and wished you ill. I did not know how to do ill, and if I had known I shouldn't have been able to do it. But that I could have given room in my soul to an evil intent is a great sin. I beg God's forgiveness and yours, neighbor."

And then a strange thing happened: the poor old

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man, with great difficulty, knelt down before her and raised his arms imploringly. She found it hard to lift him to his feet again.

The two girls laughed, and managed to slip away; and for years thereafter, when one played a practical joke upon the other, she was always required to kneel and ask foregiveness, else God would be displeased with her. And then the two would be reconciled, and would laugh delightedly at their joke.

There was one, however, at whom they never laughed: he moved through their whole childhood, like *Baboczius*, the ghostly dog of the Lithuanians, and they shuddered at the thought of him. This was the old thief and murderer who lived in the tumbledown hut, and still sat in the road, weaving his reed baskets and grinning at them with his red gums when they were forced to pass him on their way from school. They had only to see him to gather up their skirts and run as fast as they could straight across the marsh, through potato fields and muddy ditches to the safety of home. Yet he had never done them harm.

Their neighbor Witkuhn was a kind uncle who brought them barley-sugar and walnuts and gave them German books to read. In the books there were stories of kings' daughters and princes and other eminent persons to whose number they belonged. His invalid wife was still alive, and allowed herself to be cared for by their mother. But they were not to be caught doing maid service for others!

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Even though Urta might have liked to do it, Katrika would never have consented. It was a mystery to her that anything so useless should continue to live.

Smailus' wife—the fourth—had some grievance or other against them and scarcely permitted her children to play with them. She was a shrewish woman, who treated her husband as if he were a farm hand. But their farm prospered. He would call occasionally, and complain to the Baltruschats: "How can the horses in the barn help me now; or my dead wives? I can't forget the third one."

And Erdma would answer, "See here, neighbor: you only got what was coming to you."

Urta had a white body and a clever head: therefore she was to seek her fortune abroad. Katrika would continue her education. She grew and grew until she nearly touched the sky; and so they called her Kitten. She was as lazy as a cat, and for this reason had to have an estate.

Thus everything was appointed for the best.

13

The flood, the flood! But what was a flood? They could survive a little water, as they had done before. They had done so nearly every spring. Still, they heard that people returning from the river were tethering their cattle and loading their bedding. The carts formed a long line along the Russ embankment, and were said to be crowded to-

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gether at the entrance to the long bridge, unable to move any farther. The market at Heydekrug was overflowing, and there was no other shelter anywhere. Erdma said to Jons, "See if there is any truth in it." He drew on his hip boots and waded forth.

The compound was under water; but that meant nothing. The board walk was also under water, but the ground beneath was still frozen solid. She could see from the window that it was solid. Where Jons walked the water made playful little ripples over his foot-prints: if they had sunk in, the water would have spurted into the air. Beyond, a grey mist lay over the neighbors' houses, and they seemed so far away that it was easy to imagine them in another world. Everything was still. There was no breeze, and the roofs were dripping. In the barn the red-spotted cow began to low. The cows had not been given their morning hay. Then the pigs began to squeal. Erdma said to her daughters, "We must feed them." But the girls did not like to go out, for the water was wet. So Erdma drew off her stockings, pinned her dress high, and shuffled in her sabots into the yard. The boards which had been laid as far out as the barn had already begun to float, and when she stepped from one to another the water shot up into the air. At length she reached the barn.

The pigs were already deep in water. They were restless and would not eat. The black-and-white cow, however, was hungry. She had come from the

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lowlands and knew all about these things. But the spotted red was worried and sought to stand where it was least wet. The horse, of course, was courageous, though the wet straw could not have given him much pleasure. Erdma did what she could, but she could not then and there raise the barn floor another foot: that was a fortnight's work in summer. She was reluctant to leave the beasts and went from one to another, patting and stroking them reassuringly. That was all she could do. From the house she heard screams: "Mamma! mamma!" "What is it?" "The water is in the room!" So, back she went.

The boards scarcely held her now. She set her foot down on one, and it spun round, and she was in the water up to her knee. Still, she got through after a fashion.

True, the water was in the room, and not at all in the fashion of an unwanted guest. It had made itself quite at home, and you could see yourself reflected in it as in a mirror. The girls looked at her reproachfully and said, "Where are we to sit?" "Sit on the table," said Erdma. Her legs were icy cold. Hunting a bit of woolen cloth to wrap round them, she opened the chest. The water had already got into it and wet the clothing. So she sat down on the bench beside the stove and raised her legs to the hot brick wall, which was still able to give some warmth. The girls had scrambled upon the table, where their breakfast still stood. They broke off bits of bread

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and dipped them into a dish of lard. They were too indolent to spread the lard.

Erdma was about to set one foot on the ground when she drew back in alarm. Even here the water was over her ankles. From beneath the bed came floating potatoes and the jar of grease which served them as butter. Merrily, Urta fished it up. And since it was now impossible to butter anything they took turns drinking from the jar, each laughing at the other's mustache.

"Mamma," said Katrika, "if we have to get away, who is to come for us?"

"The king will send a prince," Erdma replied. She was beginning to be cross. Then it occurred to the girls that their polished shoes were in the cupboard and were surely wet. Katrika spoke: "Oh, mamma, your feet are cold already. Please get us our shoes."

"Get them yourself," said Erdma, who was shivering.

This made them very angry. But since Katrika had to go to class on Wednesday she yielded, and shoved a chair forward towards the cupboard with her foot. Kneeling on the seat, she opened the door. The shoes had long since been filled with water, and one of them lay on its side, so that when she picked it up water ran from it on to the floor. Thereupon the two girls began to cry as if no misfortune had ever before occurred in the world. But they had no notion of what was still awaiting them.

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Erdma felt of a sudden very helpless. "Look out," she said, "and see if your father is on his way back."

They peered through the window and said after a bit, "Neighbor Witkuhn is trying to drive the cattle along the road, but they won't stir."

"Is it as bad as that?" Erdma wondered, and her heart leapt into her throat. She sprang down from the bench. After all, she had stood often enough in the icy waters of the ditch to be able to endure this. "Come with me to the barn," she said.

To the girls it seemed that they had not heard her properly. Right through that high water! Impossible! "Stay here and drown, then," said Erdma. And so they got it through their heads.

The animals seemed to have gone mad. The pigs ran squealing round in a circle and the cows tore Erdma's hands with their halters. The horse alone remained quiet, trembling and submissive. And still Jons had not returned!

Suddenly Witkuhn stood behind her, wet to the hips. "I turned my stock over to Smailus to drive with his. The pigs slipped into the ditch and will drown. You won't be able to get yours out, either."

"What is going to happen, neighbor?" She wrung her hands.

"There is room in your hay loft. Better put the cows up there."

Erdma was sure she had heard wrong. Since when could cows climb ladders?

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"Bring me a saw and a shovel," he said; "and a pitchfork. "I'll show you how to go about it. After that I'll go see to my wife and put her in a safe place. She is abed and can't move."

Erdma brought what he had asked for.

"There are bricks lying outside, left over from the building," he went on. "Fish them up out of the water and bring them here."

The girls were on the point of refusing to do this, so he stirred them up with his boot. That helped. They brought in bricks in their wet arms, Katrika meanwhile complaining that she would catch cold.

Witkuhn spread a layer of brick on the barn floor, directly beneath the opening in the loft, and then another layer. Upon this he began to heap manure, and on that he stood the spotted cow, the beast following him willingly enough. Then, still under the cow's hoofs he continued to heap manure, until despite herself she began to rise higher and higher in the air. "This is the way to do it," he said, swinging up through the trap. He sawed the loft floor through until he had made an opening wide enough to admit the cow, whose head was already nearly on a level with the roof. Meanwhile, the water was gathering at the base of the unstable construction, so that it was on the point of floating away. "Set boards against it!" he cried, and the little girls did as they were told. Now that they were wet through, they worked hard—because that was the only way

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in which they could keep from growing numb with cold.

The pigs stood up on their hind legs and tripped along next the wall like great rats in a cage. Who was to lift them up? They were too stupid to stand still on a rising platform. "We need more men," said Witkuhn. Suddenly he clasped his hands to his forehead and groaned aloud: "And her lying there helpless!" Clearly, his conscience was troubling him. But he stayed because it was Erdma who needed him.

The spotted cow had been safely transported when Jons appeared, wet as a drowned rat. "I had a boat for you," he said; "but the others threw me out of it. While we were fighting the boat was overturned and a child was drowned. There's no going on foot now until you get to the dike."

Erdma felt of his arms and legs. They were stiff. When the muscles in his back stirred they came to life.

"Neighbor," said Witkuhn, "one cow is up above. Try to hoist the other. Erdma knows how. Let the horse out, and he will swim to the dam by himself. But the pigs will have to drown."

"I may be able to get them up too," said Jons.

"Nothing is impossible," said Witkuhn as he splashed towards the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Jons.

"My wife is in bed, helpless."

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"Then say an Our Father for her," Jons replied. "The other side of the road is a raging river. You can't get through, and if you try you'll drown."

"I must," Witkuhn said, and he disappeared.

They leveled the heap. Parts of it swam upon the water. The black-and-white stood quietly upon the bricks, but the manure would not hold. Jons broke up the hay rack and the pigs' trough, and reenforced his structure. The pigs were in agony and scrambled against the humans, who shoved them off. The horse began to be restless. Jons led him out, and surely enough, after trying for a while to return to his stall he started wisely on his journey downstream.

They shoveled and shoveled and used every pail and barrel in order to raise up their heap as high as possible. Finally they got the black-and-white into the loft. By this time one of the pigs lay motionless in the water while the others, half strangled but still squealing, were thrust high upon the heap and so into the loft.

There was no food nor any dry clothing. Jons had reached the limit of his strength. He lay down upon the hay and was seized by convulsive tremors.

"I am going back to the house for dry things," said Erdma.

"You'll drown, you'll drown!" the girls cried, but she paid them no heed. The water in the yard came up to her breast. It was no longer still as it had been. It moved in circling eddies and was filled

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with pieces of ice thicker than peat blocks. They must have come from the river, so it was sure that the dam had burst somewhere. But the air was calm. It was going to grow colder in the night. From the direction of the embankment came the hollow sound of men and beasts, and an occasional agonized cry, as of some one dying. Yet all about was tranquillity, as though life had long since been extinct.

The water in the house had reached the table top. The chairs were floating. But in the cupboard she found that the upper parts of the clothes that hung there were dry. The lower parts were trailing in the water. She snatched up what she could lay her hands upon, including Jons' sheepskin, which was drying on the brick stove. He, at any rate, would be warm. Twice, three times, she went back and forth with her heavily laden arms held high, and the currents were swifter at each passage. Then she undressed, rubbed her body warm with hay, and burrowed naked into the depth of the loft. The girls screamed, and Jons tossed with fever, but she fell asleep and slept like a log through the rest of the night.

The dawn was red, and on the water shone a thin, bright blue layer of ice in which snow-grey blocks were frozen fast. Erdma thought of the old murderer's prophecy: whoever approached the water now would feel his flesh torn by the thousand knives of the sharp ice. Everything the old man had threatened had now come to pass, except that they were not stuck fast in the chimney. But the Lord knows

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what might have happened if they had stayed in the house. What was called a roof in these parts would never have protected them. The pillars were bent over, and the house looked like a sheaf of rye about to collapse. She got up and dressed. Yesterday's clothes were still wringing wet, but those she had brought to the barn seemed almost dry. The girls were asleep, and Jons was jabbering in his fever. The cows had settled themselves peacefully, and the pigs wanted their breakfast. Moving about, she felt that the barn was no longer perfectly secure. And yet it had been built for eternity.

What had happened to the houses about them? The air was very clear, and she could see them as well as if they were close by. At Witkuhn's water was running out of a dormer window. Had he got home? Was his wife still alive? At Smailus' the chimney had crashed down through the roof and was now a shapeless mass of brick. And next to it was —what? There was a house there, and it had not been there yesterday. How did it get there? On the other hand, the old murderer's hut had vanished from its site. Still, that strange house on Smailus' place: that was it! Yet it was not rooted there. The strength of the current was driving it slowly, slowly forward. With every minute that passed its position was changed: she could see that in relation to Smailus' lawn. Or perhaps it was not the current that was driving it forward? Even without a layer of ice, the current was not as strong as that. What were those

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poles which rose and fell at the back of this strange house? It was not a house any more at all: it was a boat; a boat moving through water, propelled by some one. And hadn't the old scarecrow said something about Noah's Ark? There it was now. It was coming forward, slowly but surely. Would it come as far as the barn? Or would it go by? Erdma waved her arms through the loft window and cried, "Here, here!"

The girls awoke and sprang up. "Mamma, mamma! What is it?"

"Call out to him!"

And all three stood screaming, "Here, here, here!"

It was now quite close to their path, where the birches stood almost to their tips in ice. And it was a real boat, a flat-bottomed boat with high sides. To think that during all these years he had kept it hidden in dung so that the neighbors might suspect nothing!

"Here, here!" They could hear the crackling of the ice as it struck against the hull and clinked. Now they saw the old man. A tattered sheepskin hung on his body. He was swinging his pole and laughing, laughing, laughing!

"Neighbor, here!"

"So I am suddenly a neighbor, am I? Ha! The dear neighbor! The kind neighbor! If you wanted to get up a *talka* now, I could be of some help, couldn't I? Eh?"

"Forget, neighbor, and help us."

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"I forget nothing! Not a single slander! Not one insult! And I go by all you who are drowning and laugh as if I were at a wedding."

"Neighbor, have pity on us!"

"Did you have pity on me? Yes, you did, once. You once tossed me a bit of wedding cake. You have forgotten that; but I haven't. And so I invite you to a wedding at my house—you and whatever you've got in there with you."

"Jons! Get up!"

No one knew where Jons really was. He was dreaming of haying in summer fields. And the girls were crying that they didn't want to go. They had rather drown than enter the house of that robber and murderer.

Erdma did not share their view. Seizing Urta, she threw her so hard down upon the old man's roof that the thatch covering almost gave way. And she did the same with Katrika. But Jons! "Jons! Get up! Time to go out to the field!" And by all that is holy, he actually got up. He allowed himself to be dressed in the sheepskin under which he had lain the night through.

But how was she to get him down? It would never do to shove him off on to the roof, for he would slide into the water. "Jons! Be reasonable! Jump!" But he would not. He had to go to the fields. Then it occurred to her to throw hay in a stack on the roof. "Look, Jons! A load of hay. Jump down to it, or we'll go along without you."

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Hay! He understood that. He jumped and stuck fast in a hole in the roof and was saved. The cattle had to be left behind. They had hay and would feed, but the pigs would have to go hungry.

And so away! The old man turned and steered in the direction of the embankment.

"Aren't you going to help any one else, neighbor?"

"Help? Who helped me, eh?"

"Taruttis prayed for you."

"But he never spoke to me. And besides, he has already got away."

"Witkuhn and his sick wife are there."

"Let Witkuhn drown. Let them all drown."

"Witkuhn is not going to drown. And if you don't do as I say, I'll push you into the water. I'm stronger than you are."

"Is that your gratitude, you slut!"

"Gratitude or no gratitude, I will; I'll push you in."

She had fists like iron: he saw that at once. With an oath he passed the pole to her. She turned and moved beneath the frozen birches down the road. It was slow going, very slow. The ice grated as if it were showing its thousand angry teeth. The old man danced to and fro, threatening to get his ax and kill her. But she laughed at him and continued to propel the boat until she had reached Witkuhn's farm.

"Neighbor! Neighbor Witkuhn!"

Nothing stirred. There seemed no living soul in

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that house. Only the cat sat whining on the roof while the water splashed from the splintered ice that lined the gable.

"Neighbor Witkuhn!"

Something moved slowly through the dark dormer window into the light. It was a bed, and in it lay the dead wife, tied with rope. Witkuhn was pushing it forward from behind. The bed splashed into the water and Witkuhn swam after it. Suddenly the cat jumped down. When the bed had been securely tied, Witkuhn clambered aboard.

"How did you find her?"

"Whether she drowned or froze to death I don't know. When I got her up into the garret she had long been dead." And so they moved on. Witkuhn held out his hand in gratitude to the old man who grasped it as eagerly as if he had himself been the rescuer. Now he was anxious to steer his boat himself. He promised to pass no house from which cries might come forth. Since a man's hand had been placed in his he had taken a fancy to rescues.

Erdma, however, offered the pole to Witkuhn. He was wet through and should not grow numb. For the first time she found a moment in which to look round. The two girls sat huddled together in a corner, and Jons was groaning above on the thatch roof. The house was strange enough: not much bigger than a goat shed. The floor was laid with long rudders, the *putschinen* with which the lumbermen steer their timber rafts. They had been

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laid close together and the chinks carefully stopped and tarred. A bed and an iron stove constituted all the furniture. And since there was no chimney requiring a foundation, the whole framework rose on the moving waters like any raft or boat.

They dragged forth three housefuls of marsh-dwellers, wet and stiff with cold, and all were allowed to creep inside and warm themselves, for a coal fire was burning. The old murderer passed from one to the other, shaking hands tirelessly. Those who refused him got oaths and insults.

And thus they came nearer and nearer the embankment, where the water stood within an inch or two of its top. Cattle were lowing for barn and fodder. Frozen children cried in carts, and women ran to and fro with buckets of steaming coffee. Everywhere was to be heard the voice of the Steward: all around them, rising above the sound of dispute and consternation, before and behind them, the Steward was everywhere, managing and helping with axles, with cattle, generally supervising the gradual dispersion of the crowd.

He was the first to see the house that came floating up, and it was he who held forth the chain by which the house was tied up.

"So this is your work of art, is it?" he said to the old man as he stepped from the boat. And the latter, nothing loath, asked at once for his pension.

"Go to my house first and warm up," said the Steward. Then he saw the dead woman in her bed

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which floated behind. His face, bloated and red from his twenty-four-hour vigil, became grey and solemn. Beating his fists against his forehead like a man overwhelmed by the last gasp of despair, he said in a low voice to himself, "All in vain! Twenty years of work gone for nothing!" But in the same moment he had overcome his hopelessness and was again all energy and activity. Only Erdma had overheard the secret lamentation.

The bed was detached and brought up beside the embankment. And as it floated slowly down with the current the men removed their caps. One of them led the others, and even those who did not know what had happened found themselves singing in chorus the old burial song:

Yau su Diewu gywenkite
Yus mylimi, ne werkite,
Kunelí manó dekite
E zemé ir pakaskite.

Or as we should say:

God will guard you now, dear ones,
Weep not now that I know bliss;
Here my body lies with you,
Buried in the deep dark earth.

They sang loudly and devoutly, for though few had died, all had buried their hope forever.

There was one, however, who profited as never before: it was the old thief and murderer. Sitting

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in the middle of the striped sofa in the Steward's cheerful living room, he warmed his hands about a coffee pot, scolding, spitting, showing his gums, and telling all those who sat with a show of respect about him how cleverly he had foreseen just this contingency, how he had rebuilt his house, and how many lives he himself had saved this day. For these reasons and for many others he would now have his pension from the State, and would end his days a highly respected person.

14

Spring was, to say the least, unsympathetic. The warmer the days grew, the colder grew the fogs which enshrouded the chill marsh. The brighter the sun shone, the greater the misery it brought to light.

Jons recovered from the inflammation of his lungs and crept about on a cane like a useless old man. He had spent some time in the district hospital while Erdma and the girls had been sheltered by strangers. Now that the water had receded, the marsh folk were coming home. What they came back to was desolating. The house which Jons and Erdma had built fifteen years before was still standing, but it was only the semblance of a house. You had but to shake it hard, and it would crumple in. The room smelled of silt and putrefaction. The laid floor was soaked through, the fireplace cracked and crumbling,

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while what remained of the stove looked like a great mole hill. As high as the table-top, the room was filled with bricks and loam.

Living there was out of the question, so Erdma determined to move her husband and daughters into the barn. The cattle had been rescued by the police, who had come over that day from Koenigsberg in the train. They had found the horse safe on the causeway. The beasts were housed in the left wing of the barn, and the right wing, where the pigs had been kept, was transformed into a dwelling-place.

Jons was perfectly content, but the girls grumbled as they moved in. Was it not humiliating and unnecessary that the daughters of a landowner live in a pig-sty? Particularly now that they were about to become young women? Their reluctance availed them nothing, however. One day the carpenters arrived, long carts brought beams and boards, and the rebuilding began on the very spot where, years before, Jons and Erdma, with the help of their neighbors, had put up a house with four fir logs and four dozen planks.

This house, it must be said, was different from the other. The master builder had designed plans for one large and one small room, bedrooms, and a lumber room; and there was to be a magnificent stove of polished porcelain in the place of the brickwork smeared with clay. Meanwhile, something occurred which raised still higher the family pride. The disaster which had overtaken them had not gone un-

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noticed by the outer world. The newspapers had printed long accounts of the flood, and the rescuing Ark, together with the corpse on the floating bier, had been photographed and described. Could Witkuhn's poor wife, who had suffered so long and so silently on earth, have looked down from heaven, she would have seen to her amazement that she had become a celebrity. In the larger cities the young women had arranged balls and banquets, had sung and presented plays, on behalf of the sufferers. They had sold sweets and colored postcards, hat pins, sparkling wines and kisses; and in so doing they had with the help of fate won husbands for themselves. Most important of all, they had gone through their cupboards and boxes and found many things which they imagined to be of great utility to the marsh dwellers, who had been so suddenly and completely stripped of their belongings: holiday clothes of six years ago, petticoats frayed by laundering, moth-eaten furs and jackets, dancing shoes matched with street shoes, ancient bathing suits, and hats for every season of the year—faded, bent, crushed, ruined by inclement weather, but representing still for these dwellers in the backwoods the substance of all earthly glory;—all this was unearthed and sent to the marsh.

Nor had the gentlemen been backward: some sent old mountain-climbing costumes, because there was something about the marsh that reminded them of the highlands. Others preferred to send white flan-

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nels, because a marsh is so reminiscent of the seashore. But nearly all, in harmony with the rural character of the sufferers, had made gifts which bore the glow of summer freshness,—although there were a few who had found this a good way to rid themselves of old evening clothes. Box after box was sent by express to the Ladies' Aid, at Heydekrug. The people of the marsh, thank heaven, would at least have something to wear!

When the good ladies of Heydekrug opened the boxes and saw the faded brilliance they contained, they clasped their hands and exclaimed that they dared not carry such things to their charges. They rummaged about for the useful and the practical, intending to hide the rest; but they did not know their marsh folk. As soon as word reached the marsh of the wonders which had arrived for them, the sufferers stormed Heydekrug and sought by force and by cunning to make off with all that was most flimsy and garish. Nor was this to be marveled at. Who, having spent his life kneading black slime, clothed in rags, would resist the temptation to don the reflection of a paradise glowing in the distance? Envy and brawling arose over the possession of each shred of finery. Those who were left with something warm and dark thought themselves cheated. Insults flew through the air, and in the street a constant process of barter went on, the same object passing sometimes through ten hands in an hour, the transaction ending usually at nightfall in a fight.

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On their way home, the marsh folk put on the apparel which chance had allotted them, and they looked strangely like people freed from a madhouse. Many would stop every few hundred feet and stare at their image in the ditch water by the road. Each man was afraid lest his neighbor rob him in the darkness. Leaning against a tree, bareheaded, the old murderer, for example, stood opening and crushing thoughtfully against his chest a mysterious opera hat.

Erdma and her daughters were amongst those who went home most heavily laden, for they had disdained the flimsy, airy materials, and had brought away the heavier, more formal clothing. Erdma was still mindful of her early promise that her children should one day go in velvet and silk. This was now to be. Among other things they came away with a dress of sky-blue velvet, cut low at the neck, and embroidered with glistening beads. Katrika would wear this at her confirmation, and so outshine the daughters of even the most distinguished Germans who, to the envy of the peasants, were always grouped about the altar in white mull dresses. And since the owner of the frock had clearly been of the most ample proportions, it could be cut down in such a way as to provide a holiday dress for Urta. And when that was finished, there would still be enough left for the trimming of Erdma's blouse.

Thus, on confirmation day, they all went to church dressed in sky-blue velvet. The people of Heyde-

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krug laughed at them, being jealous of them. But there was one who did not laugh; it was the clergyman's wife. As soon as she saw Katrika, gleaming like a bird of paradise among the children awaiting confirmation, she grasped her by the velvet collar and pulled her into the vestry.

"How did your mother dare, child, to send you before the altar of God in such a get-up!"

She was bound to send the child home on the instant; but, moved by Katrika's tears and pleading, she produced at length a scarf of black wool and threw it over the girl's shoulders. Now she could be confirmed.

In a front pew sat the Baltruschats in the midst of envious glances. Jons was rather some one to be ashamed of, for he was not quite a gentleman. And Erdma was bitterly disappointed when she saw the pride of the family come forward behind the clergyman, condemned to the severity of black. But she was soon comforted by the reflection that the luster was still there, even though enclosed in its homely sheath. And the future would only intensify its glow. She embraced Urta, whose eyes were bluer than the velvet she wore, and during the prayers and the hymns she thought only of the bridegroom who was to come.

Jons' thoughts during the service were of the growing house whose smoothly hewn walls gleamed already across the marsh. Who would have dared, a few years earlier, to dream of such magnificence?

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All that had been drawn out of the marshy ground by the assiduous labor of their hands, out of that sticky, infertile earth lying upon its bed of water treacherously eager to devour the earth entrusted to it.

Clasping Jons' roughened hand under their table, Erdma said to herself, "We never fought while life was hard. Together we conquered in our great need. Surely we shall not quarrel now that life is growing easier and easier."

Both were blissfully conscious that the day of their reward was at hand.

15

Well! After a long breath—which lasted a full ten years—I shall go on with the story of Erdma and Jons and their two ambitious daughters.

Of Urta, the younger girl, there is not really much to tell. When, at the age of seventeen years, she went to Koenigsberg to become a waitress—for this was the first step in her path to fortune—she was a voluptuous child with cornflower eyes and a sweet mouth, as round and moist as a ripened, dewy plum. But the pictures of herself which she sent home from time to time showed her grown as tall and slender as one of the beautiful women whose images had been pasted to the walls of the first house. Soon she wrote from the World Fair at Paris, and later from beautiful Italy; and she had even sent a postcard

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from the summit of Mt. Rose, despite the cold up there which made one's fingers stiff and numb. She was no longer known as Urta. Her name was Ortrud. Nor was she Baltruschat any more. A Lithuanian name was too common for her. First she was Balte; then Baldamus; and in time she took the holy Catholic name of Balthasar. In a word, when one thought of her one's pride was beyond all telling.

Katrika, to be sure, was a little backward. She displayed no desire to seek her fortune out in the great world, and even at home she was obliged to wait before winning her rich husband. Just why this should be is hard to say. She was not without beauty. She had grown quite tall (as we know already), and the boys in Heydekrug called "Beanpole!" after her in the street. At home they called her Pussy, and this pet name made up for a great deal. Nor did she lack education. She spoke German with great delicacy and pursed her lips unfailingly. She would say, for example, "Ay em a raich lendaonah's dottah." Which should have been a lesson for many a person.

She certainly had not much to do, nor was it necessary that she do anything. They had a maid, Yetta, an abject creature, who did all the work. Yet she made fun of Katrika. When she crossed the compound she would take up her petticoat with two fingertips, roll her hips, and keep turning her head about like a turkey. But you couldn't prove any-

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thing by that. Katrika was of course too good to go into service—unless she got a place as lady's maid, or companion. But she did not want to do that either. She preferred to sit before her small mirror and curl her hair with the iron Urta had once sent her. There were times when she was as frizzly and greasy and greyish-yellow as a sheep on the shearing bench.

She was charmed by all things visionary. She loved dream books and magic tales, and read them from morning till night. She was irritated by fleas and conjured them ceaselessly. One Easter morning she got up early, swept the house as clean as a pin, and sent the sweepings straight into the ditch. That disposed of the fleas for but a short time. Yetta told Katrika to do as she did—dab them with a cloth soaked in alcohol, after which they would not revive. But catching them was a complicated business, if done in the ordinary way. She preferred to try magic.

Jons was not altogether happy about Katrika's idleness; but what could he do? Erdma always took her part. She could not go barefooted; she could not ruin her hands: if she did, the rich suitor would not think her a lady and would never return. Meanwhile, stout little Tuleweit, the professional matchmaker, had come twice to the Baltruschats'. He had let them listen to the chimes in his watch, had made the nigger-head on his stick put out its tongue, and had performed all the tricks he knew; but the bridegrooms he had to offer were small fry indeed. There

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had not been so much as one genuine German farmer among them. But Katrika got even with him by setting before him just enough *schnaps* to wet his tongue, and no more.

Erdma was in the twenty-fifth year of her life with Jons. She was no longer a beauty, and her flesh had loosened somewhat. No neighbor would fall in love with her now. She had grown hard and bony, and her endless cares and worries had brought a certain unpleasantness into her face. No one knew how many people begrudged them their bit of prosperity and yearned to hang about their necks the millstone of calamity. Time and again she found a magic broom hanging in the ash trees, and there was no telling how often the white witch's spittle had dripped from their fence pickets. Some one had even paid the Catholic priest in Szibben to say a death mass for Jons. Thank God it had done him no harm, aside from a twinge of neuralgia.

Jons had now become an old man. His hair was grey, and his face looked like a withered potato patch on a frosty night. The single thought in his mind was the management of his money, for now he had as much as five thousand marks in the savings bank. And year by year the farm was growing more magnificent. The hewn walls of the house in which they lived gleamed like silver in the sun, and the massive chimney proved to every one capable of understanding these things what a weight the marsh soil could support. Indoors, too, everything was of the best:

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the fireplace stood where it had been before, but it stood now in a high, wide hall, lined with painted doors. On the left were the large and small rooms, and on the right the bedrooms. No Lithuanian house could be more spacious. I should never end if I started to describe the furniture, the gold-framed pictures of the Kaiser, the glazed and lined stove, or the carpet with its bright design of stars. Obliquely across from the barn stood still another building in which there was a peat-drying machine. A picket fence ran round the garden in which not only rue and sweet-grass and the brightly colored flowers grew, but also carrots, lettuce, and corn as tall as a man, with a great deal left over to eat even after basketfuls had been carried on Tuesdays to market. Such was the present state of the Baltruschats, with whom none of the neighbors could compete.

As for them, pious old Taruttis was dead, and his Taruttena too. They had died on the same day, and when they were dressed in their grave clothes the flax had begun to bloom again. There were blue flowers everywhere to attest their great piety. The old murderer had actually been pensioned, and when he was borne to his grave no less than three constables followed him. Whether this was out of respect to him, or in order to keep an eye on him, no one knew. Smailus was old now, too. His fourth, of whom no one had any good to tell, was said to be vexed to the point of illness, so that if luck held he

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might still be able to take a fifth. Ulela wrote twice a year, and her soap smelled sweeter and sweeter. She had long since married the head bookkeeper, who was a partner in the factory and got on very well with the owner. How well a clever girl can manage things! And Witkuhn? He had gone down in the world. A hired girl kept his house, and he slaved from morning till night with bowed shoulders and weakened arms, trying to draw up out of the marsh the wherewithal of an existence. Yet he still helped and counseled Erdma while continuing to look past her as his chin continued to quiver. This last was by now but a habit, and would remain with him till he died. He was like a true sentinel, standing on the edge of things and guarding the wealth of others without asking if he himself was cold or sleepy.

16

Jons and Erdma sat among the trim flower-beds in their garden and looked with fondness at one another, for it was their silver wedding anniversary. A cake had been baked, as well as a hominy-seed confection, although no one but Katrika knew why. She had planned to give them a silver myrtle wreath, and had even taken the necessary measurements; but it was too much trouble to arrange for it. And that was just as well, for now there would be no chatter among the neighbors.

The spring sun came gently down upon their

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thinned hair. Jons took up his cap, which lay beside him on the bench, and put it on. Erdma laughed immoderately, for never in all their twenty-five years together had he played such a prank. She knew in her innermost heart how much she loved him. They had lived together in happiness and industry these twenty-five years, and no quarrel had disturbed their peace. He had never been drunk—except of course now and then on market day, which was in the natural course of things. He had never beaten her. She had had a good husband, and she thanked him with tears on her cheeks. He too wept a little, for such a day comes rarely. They thought of the young clergyman with the dreamer's eyes, and of the two witnesses who even on Sunday had smelled of the stable. And they thought also of the evening hour in the ditch along the Matzick road, and looked round to see if any one were close enough to hear them.

"Do you remember," Erdma asked, "what we promised one another then? It wasn't easy to keep our word, but we did it, and no quarrel has ever disturbed our peace."

"That is because of you," he said.

"You too," she answered.

And they were as happy as if some great stroke of luck had suddenly come to them.

"God be praised," said Erdma, "now we are over the mountain. What evil can befall us now?"

"We could still get into a scrape," said Jons.

They sat for a while with clasped hands in the soft

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sunlight, thinking, "Nothing could be more beautiful." But something wonderful was still to come.

As they were about to return to their work—this day being one amongst other days, after all—Erdma saw a vehicle coming forward over the log-paved street. It was a carriage such as was seldom seen on the marsh. Jons recognized the two brown horses from the *Germania* and thought, naturally, that government officials were inspecting the marsh, as they had a perfect right to do. But when the carriage drew nearer they saw there were no men in it, but a lady. And she was not seated. She was standing with a white parasol in her hand, waving and waving it. With a cry, Erdma fell back upon the bench as though dead. The carriage turned into their driveway and stopped before the gate. Katrika, amazed, rushed out of the house, curling iron and papers in her hand and tight little curls on her forehead.

It was really Urta—or Ortrud. Dressed in a frock of fine checked wool, she sprang from the carriage while behind her leapt a dog such as man's eyes had never seen before—a dog with snow-white hair, bigger than a wolf and leaner than a yearling roe. You could hardly call Urta slender, and her bosom was not as flat as a board, precisely. The violets she wore in her third buttonhole rose and fell again and again. Her eyes were still of the same cornflower blue, but her hair had become golden and her lips were as red as beet juice.

After she had kissed her, Erdma knelt to feel her

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dress and touch her shoes. She lifted the skirt a little and saw a petticoat of nothing less than reseda green silk, rustling, clinging silk. As the wind swishes through the ash trees, so Urta's silk petticoat rustled with every movement of her body.

Jons stood stunned between the gate and the fence, not venturing to approach his high-born daughter. She had to go forward to him herself, take him by the hand, and draw him out of his corner. She kissed him, too, but it was plain she did it reluctantly.

Katrika hurried into the house to comb out her newly curled hair. When she emerged she was wearing her red-flowered dress and waiting for compliments. But that day no one paid her any heed.

The white-haired hound, who looked as if he could be crushed by a touch of the hand, stood in the middle of the yard and looked round with human astonishment in his eyes while he stretched his sniffing, serpent-like head to right and left, as if asking himself how he happened suddenly to be in so evil-smelling a place. He disdained the yelping cur which, fastened to a chain, was leaping about like mad.

The trunk was unpacked. It was a trunk of bright shiny leather, as high as a house and as sweetly scented as Russian gherkins. When Urta stooped over it, with her full breasts and rounded hips, you knew that this charm and this repose could lead men like lambs to market.

For Jons there was a tobacco box of silver-inlaid

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polished wood. He was also given a kind of food, said to be much finer than sardines. It was something like black, round barley grains, and tasted of salt fish. For Erdma there was a dark silk dress with a lace vestee and frills at the throat and wrists. Katrika too got a dress, bright blue with a tulle blouse, and there was a straw hat to match. The hat bent and rebounded when you touched it. But loveliest of all was the silver wreath: not a wreath of silverfoil paper such as Katrika had intended, but a wreath made of heavy, clinking silver. And a silver *boutonnière* for Jons.

All secrecy was now dispelled. Erdma had to put on her silk dress and her silver wreath, while Jons stuck the cluster of silver in his buttonhole, and the two sat in the bridal corner, drinking sweet foreign wine and enjoying life to the full. The two daughters hovered near them, and even the wretched Yetta made herself agreeable, after a fashion. She had been given a green apron and a pair of woolen slippers—to keep her from clattering about in the morning. The only one to be displeased was the great white-haired hound. She pecked and sniffed and ran out of doors when any one came near her. Nor would she touch the food they set before her. Urta had to feed bits of dog biscuit to her (which she had not forgotten to bring), for otherwise the beast would have gone hungry during an indefinite period.

"She is a Siberian greyhound," Urta explained,

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"called Borzoi. She is of a very old and distinguished breed, with a pedigree dating back a hundred years or more." The dog had been given her by a Russian count who was a friend of her friend's, and also of hers. The dog's name was Petrouschka, at which they laughed a great deal, for Petrouschka means Peterkins.

Erdma spent the whole day staring and staring at this daughter who had come home to her. While Urta sat in the hard board chair—there was no better one—and smiled with her deep red lips, her golden hair radiating sparks of fire about her head, Erdma felt that she should creep away into a dark corner and weep and pray to God not to punish her for this transcendent happiness.

17

Urta who was now Ortrud was given a bed in the smaller room, and when Jons and Erdma got up they dared not make a sound for fear of waking her. But she did not allow herself to be disturbed. She slept peacefully until late in the morning. Then she took an hour to dress, and when her father came in from the fields she had been out but a short time. Erdma, who had bought coffee at two marks a pound, ran back and forth between the fireplace and the bedroom door, listening again and again so that breakfast might be ready at the appropriate moment.

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When the time came she carried the things in to Urta and gazed anxiously to see if her daughter found it all to her taste.

Urta lay there like an angel in her white lace night dress, with her disheveled golden hair and her dimpled throat, wearing those rings which she took off only when she washed her hands, and which glowed now like red and blue suns on the patchwork quilt. This was the hour when she sometimes took her mother into her confidence. But there was not much to tell, and long periods of silence would fall between her revelations. Erdma knew from her letters that she had risen high in the world, but what, actually, she had done was still a mystery. Many men had wished to marry her, but nothing had ever come of their desire. When they were rich and of high estate their parents objected. The others —bah! During her service as waitress in Koenigsberg all the students had flocked round her; many had fought duels over her; some had committed suicide. It was when she could no longer endure the shedding of blood that she had gone to Berlin. And there life had really begun. When Erdma asked about her plans for the future she smiled and her blue eyes looked dreamily into space. "Don't worry about me, mummy," she said. "A person like me can find gold in the streets. But first I want to rest here a bit."

And that she did thoroughly. She never allowed herself to be concerned or troubled about anything.

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She would sit indoors at the window, or out of doors on the garden bench, looking skyward and smiling. Her single preoccupation was her clothes, which she kept in careful order, brushing, ironing, and fitting shoetrees into her shoes. Her fingers, which were as round and dainty as possible, were ever busy with needle and thread.

Erdma lived as if bewitched: whatever work she might be doing, her thoughts were constantly with this returned prodigal daughter. She sought always to find work that would keep her near Urta, merely in order to observe her thoughtfully and quietly. Sometimes her pride was so great that she was overwhelmed with fear, and she wished she could say to Urta, "Try just once to be the girl you used to be." She knew very well that this was no longer possible. Urta had been too long away, and had had too many teachers in Germany. Did she not now write a pretty hand and speak French, by her own account? She had even been taught ballet dancing—which Erdma, not knowing precisely what that meant, was sure was the smartest thing that could be taught on earth.

From time to time she would take Jons' hand and say to him, "Aren't you glad? aren't you glad?" But he was not glad. He was in torment before his daughter, and ashamed of himself. There was nothing he could talk to her about; he worried over using his spoon properly; he even cut his bread secretly under the table. In the beginning she had been coyly

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tender with him, and had called him "daddy dear"; but when she saw that he was unresponsive and looked the other way, she too grew embarrassed and spoke to him only when it seemed necessary. There was no ill-feeling between them: it was merely that they were strange with one another, and they grew more and more strange as the days passed. Erdma saw this with sorrow, and Jons' taciturnity and aloofness went to her heart. But he could not be forced to display his affection.

Katrika had gone quite out of her mind. She tried constantly and unavailingly to imitate her sister in everything. She polished her nails, rouged her lips, and rinsed her hair in camomile tea. But her nails grew dirtier, her mouth was a fleck of blood, and her hair stood up around her face like wisps of hay. Her one success consisted in lying late abed. Erdma recognized this difference between them and reflected upon it. Not that she loved Katrika the less: quite the contrary, it seemed her own fault that the one daughter should be so entirely outshone by the other. Alas, even after Katrika had put on the bright blue dress and the wide straw hat, they were still as different as night and day. Erdma was upset, and she wondered what could be done for Katrika. The sisters were not on bad terms. Urta taught Katrika everything she wished to know, and she gave her combs and trinkets and ruffles, so that no envy might possess her. Yet even Urta saw that something must be done.

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"If you were Ulela," said her mother, "you would be finding her a husband."

"I can find as many as Ulela could," Urta replied. One day, when Jons had gone out to the fields, she suggested that they send for the matchmaker, little Tuleweit, who had collected commissions on a hundred marriage brokerages. He came in with a hearty step in his long frock coat and tight trousers, minded to play again the rôle of jocular uncle. But when he saw Urta looking at him in her dazzling voluptuousness, his attitude dropped from him.

"Out of what sky did you fly down to us?" he asked.

"Do sit down, Herr Tuleweit," said Urta, while Erdma brought forth what remained of the sweet foreign wine. Urta went on, "Doubtless, Herr Tuleweit, you look down upon me because of the modesty of my family . . . but we shan't talk about that." And she flattered him by suggesting that nobody was wiser than he. Tuleweit thanked her and bowed. "I am about to make a great match," she continued, "a truly great match; and it is of course important that nothing in my sister's circumstance embarrass me. She must be found a husband, a German with money of his own, so that I may be able to say that my sister is married to a great landowner. That of course would create the impression I need to convey."

Erdma thought, "She is even cleverer than Ulela," while Herr Tuleweit seemed to float like oil on per-

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fumed water. He would assuredly do everything in his modest power, he told Urta; but when all was said and done, it was really at bottom a question of Katrika's dowry. "Naturally, naturally," Urta said. If she were already married nothing would be simpler than to set her sister up properly. For the present, however, she had to think of something more modest.

"What do you call modest?" asked Tuleweit in a suddenly businesslike manner.

"Well, say five thousand marks," suggested Urta.

Jons had five thousand marks in the savings bank, a sum he had scraped together at the end of twenty years. Surely that was not what Urta had in mind. It was to be their support and refuge in their old age. Of course she meant to put up the money herself. Indeed, it seemed that a good deal more was necessary, for Tuleweit was pulling a long face and saying that if he approached anybody with so insignificant an offer he would be laughed at. But he would see what could be done, and look for a richer reward later on. With this he emptied his wine-glass and promised to report to them in a week's time.

"Do you really intend to give five thousand marks of your own money?" Erdma asked with a heart full of gratitude.

"I should do it in a minute," Urta answered, "except that even if I had it I'd need it myself."

"Where is it to come from, then?"

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"From wherever father has put it," answered Urta. "Isn't it enough that I am giving up my share?"

Erdma tried to say something, but there was a lump in her throat. Everything would be gone. Nothing left. And all this in order that Katrika find a nest.

This prospective bride, who had been hiding meantime in the bedroom, ran eagerly out. "Who is it? How many acres has he? How many horses in his stable? How many cattle grazing by the river?"

At that moment Erdma found her voice. "If it is a question of money, you can put the idea of marriage right out of your head. Your father is not going to give all his savings to you!"

Katrika wailed and rolled in grief on the floor. She would not give up her country gentleman. He had been promised her ever since she was a child; he was due her; he was hers by right.

Erdma's heart was torn. Her child was right. They had never talked of anything else. She herself had never thought differently. And so she raised Katrika up, stroked her tenderly, and promised her the moon.

Jons, coming in from the fields, saw their tear-stained faces and wondered what had happened. But he had long since stopped asking questions. Erdma's conscience was troubled, and she avoided him. Yet it was impossible to do this long, so she began by reproaching him. "You have no feeling

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for your daughters," she said. "You look at them as if you wished to strangle them."

"Who put that into your mind?" he asked.

"It is plain from your behavior," she answered. "You couldn't abide Katrika before, and now that Urta is here it is worse. You are nothing but a *kumetis*, a brute, and you'll be a common brute all your life, and everything refined will always be odious to you."

He said, "I never knew that your family was better than mine. Seems to me we were beggars together when we began."

"I had my bed, at least," she retorted, "and sixty-six marks, too. While you had as good as nothing."

"I worked two whole years for what I had," said Jons; "but who knows where you got what you brought."

She felt as if he had hit her on the head with an ax. "I accounted for every heller and every copper of it," she said with a red face, and turned away. She was so enraged against him that she could almost have poisoned him.

18

One week later little Tuleweit was back. He had some one who was not to be rejected: a man named Schmidt, not related to the shopkeeper in Heydekrug, but the son of a man who had a mortgaged farm in the neighborhood of Mineiken. There were five children, of whom he was the third. He had

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just returned from his military service and was already looking about at the girls in the district. Did they wish to meet him in the German way, which is to say by chance, at the market, or the courthouse, or anywhere at all?

Erdma understood nothing of all this, but Urta was willing to undertake the negotiations. It was arranged to introduce young Herr Schmidt at the next horse fair. He would bring a white horse of his father's to the fair, and the girls would stroll over to admire it. Herr Tuleweit would look after the rest.

This plan was gone over hour after hour, day after day, in all its smallest details. For the three women, nothing else in the world existed. Excitement ran so high that even the essential housework was neglected. Meanwhile, Jons went silently about like a stranger in his own house. Had he not at this time made a new friend he would have been more alone than ever before in his life.

The friend was Urta's aristocratic white hound. It had come about with incredible slowness. At first the dog would stand in the yard and move quietly to one side when any one wished to touch her. She never growled nor showed her teeth; yet whoever tried to stroke her found himself stroking the air. No one, not even her mistress, had been able to coax her into the house. Of course, when she was pulled in by the collar, she went; but in a moment she was back out of doors. She had found a place to sleep

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in an open shed where the carts were kept and where hay was always strewn. There Urta would bring her food, and there she would lie, gazing mutely around. Only Jons had not attempted to win her with caresses. She seemed to him too sensitive and too magnificent for that. And thus one morning, when he left the house to go out to his work in the marsh, who should slink cautiously at a distance behind him and lie down at the edge of the ditch with her eyes fixed upon him? Who remained silently without food or water until Jons went home for his noonday meal? Who gradually came closer, taking bread finally from his fingers with slow, delicate movements? And who, when Jons went out to the meadow, loped in a long-legged gait before his cart and stood watch over it for hours at a time until it returned piled with hay? Who but the hound?

Urta marveled at the change. Yet, people had always said these wolfhounds were faithless. So she left the dog to her father. However, when she strolled out on the highway in the direction of Heydekrug or Russ, she took the hound with her in order that the people who saw them might have something to talk about. It was nearly an hour's walk to Heydekrug, but she enjoyed it, for there people stopped and stared in amazement, unable to comprehend at once what they saw. At such moments Urta felt like Ortrud, the messenger from that great world which began in Berlin, upon whom all those stared long-

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ingly whose destiny it was to remain ever in the backwoods. From time to time one met young men with dueling scars who had undoubtedly studied at Koenigsberg, and in whose lap one had undoubtedly at one time sat. With a single alluring glance one brought them down,—for one must have a little sentimental diversion in the dreary waste of this marshland. There was only the Steward's house that Urta disliked to pass. Of course she could not know, but she felt intuitively that at the window were two eyes, searching and incorruptible, which were scrutinizing her and her life. . . .

The day came of the great cattle and horse fair at which the farmers from far and near gathered to swap and drink. Jons had gone early in the day, driving a cow which was first to be exhibited and then traded. Of course the sisters had not appeared until after he left. They could not be seen in his company, on this errand, without losing the esteem they wished to gain. With luck they might even pass him in the crowd without having to speak once to him.

Katrika had been dressed by Urta with particular care. She had not been allowed to curl her hair nor paint her lips: to Pussy this was an indication of her sister's jealousy. Urta had smiled, and even when two pairs of white gloves had burst on her sister's hands, she had not grown angry. Thus they started forth, with Erdma's prayer behind them.

The afternoon passed at home in work and anxiety.

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Jons came in towards five o'clock. He had made a good trade. There was every reason to believe that the new cow would give eight quarts of milk; yet he had paid very little for her in addition to the cow he had traded in. But he was not in an agreeable mood. He ate his supper in bad humor and did not inquire about his daughters.

After supper he went out to Petrouschka who had been chained up in the early morning because she too had wanted to go to the fair. Erdma saw him take the long narrow head in his arms, bend his own head, and speak softly to the hound. It wrung her heart. She went out to him and said, "You can talk to animals, who have no mind, but to me, your wife, you can't say one kind word."

He said, "I met the two girls, all dressed up, with two strange men. When they saw me they turned their heads aside. Isn't that enough?"

Of course she defended her daughters. "Who can see everything at once?" she demanded. But he insisted: they had even turned to see if he was finally out of sight. "And supposing that's so: how can I help it?" she asked. Then his long repressed bitterness overflowed into the light. "How can you help it?" he cried. "You who brought up two useless girls who won't work, who want to eat off gold plates, who lie on their backs until noon, who go round with Germans and look down upon their father as if he was a kitchen boy! How can you help it! Well, you

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might have been a mare, at least, and produced colts instead of goats!"

And on her side all her pent-up wrath rushed forth. She could not let his anger go unchallenged. "Once before you tried to quarrel with me," she said. "This time you have come to the right person." And in a torrent of speech she reminded him that it was to her he owed his prosperity, that he had been no more than her hired man, working for twenty-five years under her direction, and easy to replace by another hired man if she chose to engage one. His eyes widened and moved from right to left and back again, as if he were looking for something he could not find.

"All that may be so," he said; "but there is one thing no other hired man could do that I can do, and that is give you the beating you deserve." He tore out of the ground the heavy stake to which Petrouschka was chained and struck her across the back. She fell screaming to the ground and tried to shield herself with upraised arms. Yetta, who had been standing by and whimpering, now screamed and sprang forward to grasp his arm, for the stake was heavy and its blows were dangerous. But he threw it from him, and brought a whip from the stable. Petrouschka leaned against him and whined and licked his hand imploringly, but he paid no attention to her. Slinging the hemp cord about the handle, he let it whistle through the air in an arc.

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Then he returned to where Erdma still knelt upon the ground.

Suddenly neighbor Witkuhn stood before him, white and distraught as usual. Jons could have blown him away like a feather; but he held in his hand a small rifle with which ordinarily he shot the sparrows from his cherry trees. It would have been easy to tear the rifle from his hand,—but what then? How can a man beat his wife with two people butting in? So he grew calm and said merely, "Neighbor, have you ever heard the phrase alienation of affection and threats with deadly weapons?" Witkuhn said nothing, but placed himself between Jons and Erdma. "For the first and last time I order you to leave my house and my land." Still Witkuhn did not move. His finger lay beside the trigger of his rifle. "Very good," Jons went on. "I'll have a lawyer draw up the papers. But I'll take the whip with me, and I'll meet the girls on the way. They will get the beating that is due their mother."

Erdma groaned and fell flat on the ground; but Jons went his way without turning back. He did not go to the lawyer, nor did he meet the girls. He slept with Petrouschka in the hay, and when he came into the house at dinner time he found it empty—no wife, no daughters, no hired girl. They had all gone to Witkuhn's: he could hear their voices across the road. And the bank pass book also was gone. Of all that had belonged to him yesterday there re-

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mained only the strange dog which looked up at him with sad human eyes as if to console him for the pain he had suffered—pain which was after all the dog's pain, too.

19

For twenty-three years neighbor Witkuhn had been waiting for Erdma. Here she was, and he was an old man. He sat and looked at her, and he looked at her again and again. She was still the youngest, the loveliest, the most beautiful of women; but he was an old man. He let her daughters laugh and romp and chatter to their hearts' content, and paid them no heed. They were to him two strange animals whom Erdma had brought with her and to whom he must give shelter because they were hers. Outside was Yetta, working with his hired girl.

What Urta and Katrika had gone through the day before was of the highest importance, and they told their story over and over again. The younger Schmidt had no sooner seen them than he had been captivated by them. To be sure, he had thought at first that it was Urta for whom he was being sought; and he had been rather inclined to withdraw, thinking himself not good enough for her. But when he learned that it was Katrika who was in question, he agreed to the proposal with the greatest eagerness, and sat with the girls and Tuleweit at the *Germania* until late in the afternoon. Tuleweit told them of a farm which could be had for five thousand marks,

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plus the cost of such cattle as they might need, for Schmidt's father could give him nothing at all.

When she heard the word cattle, Erdma pricked up her ears. She could hear the mournful lowing of her own cows, which had not been milked and had probably not been fed that morning. She sent Yetta over with a milk-pail, though the girl refused at first to go, fearing to be beaten. She went, however, and when she came back she described her master seated on a bench with his head in his hands while Petrouschka lay at his feet, and said he had not even looked up at her approach.

Meanwhile, Urta went on with her story. At three in the afternoon Herr Schmidt was forced to leave. But at another table sat two charming young men with dueling scars and gold-rimmed glasses who had long been trying to make their acquaintance, had drunk her health, and so on. They ended around the same table, drinking gayly until evening. The young men had begun by imagining Tuleweit to be their father, but when they learned he was only a marriage broker they jollied him so that in his embarrassment he went home. After that they had a really good time. The sisters tittered and winked at one another, and were too full of secrets.

Erdma thought of looking after Witkuhn's house, but Jons had all but broken her back with that blow of the stake. This being mentioned, Urta was able to persuade her to get a doctor's certificate with a view to the coming divorce, before it was too late.

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At four in the afternoon Jons harnessed a horse to his cart and drove off without once glancing at the house across the road. Now was the time for them to transfer what they hadn't been able to carry to Witkuhn's the night before. Across the front door, to which Erdma had a key, Jons had nailed a couple of boards by way of protection against burglars. It was too ridiculous: you could pull them away with your hands. While Urta and Katrika packed their belongings, Erdma took what she would need to wear on Sunday. And of course each brought her own bedding, since Witkuhn could not provide that for them all. Let Jons look after his own blanket! They took the feather bed, and so many things besides that the neighbor's wheelbarrow made four trips back and forth across the log-paved road.

It was hard to take leave of the cows. Erdma could not milk them because of her lame back. She stroked their sides and tossed hay to them, thinking, "How nice it would be if I had them all over there!" She had grown attached even to the new one, although she had scarcely seen it. Then she fed the pigs and went back. . . .

Towards midnight there was a fearful noise at Witkuhn's door. Blow after blow fell against his shutters, and Jons's voice was heard shouting drunkenly, "Thieves! robbers! Come out here and I'll kill you all! First my whorish wife. And then her——" He did not say *lover;* he used a coarser word. And

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he insulted his daughters and vilified the hired girl, and threatened to kill them all.

Urta and Katrika knelt in their night dresses beside their mother's bed and screamed at each blow which threatened to split the shutters. Outside their bedroom door Witkuhn was calling through the keyhole that there was nothing to be afraid of; he had his rifle in his hands, and whoever broke in would regret it. In the end the madman went away, and even the whining and moaning of Petrouschka ceased to be heard.

The next morning Witkuhn and Erdma had a long talk.

"I thought yesterday that you might go back," Witkuhn said; "but I realize to-day that you have burned your bridge. But do as you think best: I shall do everything you wish."

"I don't know which way to turn," Erdma answered.

And Witkuhn said, "All my life I have thought that the greatest happiness on earth would be to have you for my wife. Now that the possibility seems assured, I see how hard it all is. For every one will say what he was shouting last night, that we have been living together for years."

"That is almost true," said Erdma.

"If it were true," Witkuhn said, "we should long ago have ceased to feel any shame or conscience about it, and should laugh when people pointed their

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fingers at us. But now I already shrink at the thought of meeting him on the road."

Erdma was offended. "I am not forcing myself upon any one," she said.

"And I am an old man," Witkuhn went on. "I should not like to feel that you may curse me when you carry me to my grave."

"Then the only thing left for me," said Erdma, "is to go to live with Katrika when she is married. I could arrange to turn over her farm to her only upon my death."

"Are things as bad as that?" asked Witkuhn.

"If," said Erdma, pressing her hand against the bank pass book which she carried next her skin, "I turn over all I've got, things will be as bad as that."

"He has probably stopped payment at the bank already," suggested Witkuhn.

"Perhaps not," Erdma said. And as she had to go to Heydekrug for a doctor's certificate, she would stop and collect the five thousand marks at the same time. The money was hers as much as his.

Witkuhn, who had no cart, borrowed one, and Erdma's swollen body was lifted into it by two men. The doctor who examined her said seriously, "It looks pretty bad, and what I am going to write will be pretty bad, too. But my advice to you, nevertheless, is to let bygones be bygones."

Until this moment everything had seemed to Erdma a sort of bad dream. Often she had thought,

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"If only he would come forward and say, 'Let us forget everything,' God knows I would go back to him." Yet, when the doctor said, "It looks pretty bad," she turned to stone inside, and thought only of justifying herself before God and man.

The savings teller had known her for years and paid over the money without question. "Of course," he said; "if you want to marry off your daughters!" And so she held the money in her hands.

Katrika, who had accompanied her mother in order to help her into and down from the cart, could not be tender enough. She called her *ma* and *mummy* (as only Urta had hitherto done), and even *mane baltgalwele*—my white-haired one—the name given in the old songs to even those mothers whose hair is still dark.

Erdma continued to think on the way back that they might meet Jons, but they did not. However, shining in their field about five hundred feet from the road was something bright: it was Petrouschka who sat watching over her master. Jons was drunk again. From afar they heard the lowing of the cows. Erdma said to herself that they would die there, left to themselves.

"Have you room for them in your barn?" she asked her neighbor.

"I have room for everything that is yours," he answered.

Instantly she sent Yetta and Witkuhn's hired girl across for the cows.

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Katrika was dancing about like one possessed. The money first, and now the cattle: she had everything, and now she could be married. She would go that very evening to see little Tuleweit in order that the marriage might be arranged as early as possible. Urta thought somewhat of going with her, for their road would lead to Heydekrug and the scarred young men would be waiting somewhere along the way. But she was annoyed that Petrouschka should not be with her, Petrouschka who would lend ten times more distinction to her; and in the end she stayed at home.

Erdma lay trembling lest the removal of the cows bring about a repetition of last night's incident. But nothing happened. She lay abed the entire week and could sit up only by clutching a hanging towel and pulling herself up. Meanwhile the girls made the most of their opportunity to transfer whatever might add value to the dowry—the large corner table, the brightly flowered cupboard, and many things besides. No one hindered them. Jons left early every morning and returned after dark. Petrouschka was always with him. What he did, and where he went, nobody knew.

On the fifth day of Erdma's idleness a young man came into the room. He had a German-cut beard and sharp, restless eyes. Behind him walked Katrika with flushed face and freshly curled straw-like hair. She was nearly a head taller than he and looked as if she could carry him in her arms. This was her betrothed, young Herr Schmidt. He addressed

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Erdma in broken Lithuanian. Raising herself up in bed she said to him in German:

"What must you be thinking, sir! We talk German just as good as you do; and I am in bed only because I sprained my back. Usually I can work as well as the youngest of them."

Katrika and the young man glanced at one another furtively, and Erdma guessed that she had already told him everything. She thought she read something else in that glance, too, but that thought she put from her. He would have liked to take the money away with him at once. She felt it next her body and knew they would have to kill her before they could take it from her. "The contract," she said, "must read that I shall be taken care of until I die, shall be allotted so and so much potatoes and corn, and the right to keep chickens, and still other rights which I shall mention later. Otherwise there will be no contract."

Katrika began to cry and to complain that her mother was standing in the way of her happiness. But young Herr Schmidt said, "That will all appear in our contract, which is quite a different contract to the one I shall sign when I buy the farm. It is no concern of the farmer's what arrangements we may make between ourselves."

At this Erdma realized that the stupid German was cleverer than she, and she promised to do as he might suggest. But she would do nothing until she

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had recovered and could go with them to the court-house to supervise the details.

Again Katrika and the young man looked at one another. Clasping hands, however, they knelt beside her bed and besought her blessing. She wept as she kissed them and blessed them. But to herself she was saying, "I must ask a lawyer about this."

20

The Steward always sat at his desk, and when any one passed the house he would go to his window and look out. That was his way of studying the human beings who were in his care. From their appearance, their gait, the hour at which they exchanged visits, and the loads they carried, he could tell precisely how they were getting on in life, whether they were improving their condition or going to the dogs. The Steward was no longer young. The thirty years which he had devoted to the marsh had begun to whiten his hair. But his eyes were as sharp as ever, and he continued to steer two thousand destinies on an even keel.

One balmy summer evening he saw Jons Baltrus-chat going home on foot. Yet that same morning he had seen him driving by in his market cart. He had been watching Jons for some time past. In the morning Jons went to the meadow, and in the evening he came home drunk. Beside him ran the

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strange white hound which belonged to that female who was Jons' daughter. To-day, however, Jons was afoot, lurching as he walked. But his gait was rather that of a sick man than a drunken one. The Steward raised his small window, through which the pole with the leather bag had previously been thrust, and called out, "Jons! come in here."

Startled, Jons pretended not to hear. Yet when the Steward called again he was forced to submit. He turned and came into the house, Petrouschka following him. She went over at once to the Steward, put her serpent's maw into his hand, and raised her limpid eyes as if to say, "Can't you do something?" A single look convinced the Steward that Jons was in danger. But he knew that harshness would avail him nothing, so he said almost casually, "I thought I saw you go by in your cart this morning. Did you leave it somewhere?"

"Yes," said Jons, "I left it somewhere."

"Where?"

"On the highway."

"Why?"

"Well, I did."

Nothing more could be got out of him.

"Then we'll go get it," said the Steward, reaching for his cap.

But Jons would not go. "No use going," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because the horse is gone."

"Where is it?"

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"Who knows?"

"Oh," said the Steward. "You were drunk. You lay down in the ditch. When you came to, some one had unhitched your horse."

"Who knows?"

"And yet you pass my house without lodging a complaint. Don't you want that good brown horse back again?"

"Doesn't matter."

"It used to matter."

"The cows were there then."

"Aren't they there now?"

"Nothing there now. Pigs gone too, yesterday."

"Who took them?"

"Well, Erdma and the girls."

"And you let them do it?"

"Doesn't matter."

And he would say no more.

Petrouschka continued to gaze up at the Steward as man up at God our Saviour. He stroked her slender back which was now matted and scarred and dark grey in color. And he asked, "How does it happen that this strange dog follows you around?"

"It just happened," said Jons.

"Do you know the kind of daughter you have?" asked the Steward.

"Don't want to know."

Thereupon he went out. The Steward telephoned round the countryside about the brown horse, and then spent a restless night. Next morning he sum-

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moned Smailus, who walked in unsteadily on a sort of crutch. His eyes were glassy now, but his face had still its keen Polish glance and his mustache rose belligerently as if he were ready on the spot to meet the Muscovites in battle. But he no longer indulged in battle. His fourth wife had attended to that. It might have been God's will that she die, but she had somehow arranged in advance that he was to dislike his fifth.

"What is wrong at the Baltruschats'?" asked the Steward. Smailus told him.

"Why didn't you come of your own accord and tell me?"

His wife hadn't let him.

"Why not?"

Jons had once attached a goat of hers, and she wanted her revenge.

"What did she attach of his?"

Smailus laughed slyly. "There's no telling," he confessed. And his own wife! But the Steward was not much interested in that.

"Do you think there has been anything between Erdma and Witkuhn?"

This question was too hard for Smailus. That his own four wives had been faithful to him, he was sure. But one could never swear to other men's wives.

"But have you noticed anything?"

No, he hadn't. And so he was dismissed.

The Steward was still in a quandary. Should he

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go to see Erdma at Witkuhn's house, or should he summon her? At that moment he saw her in the road. She was still limping, and her head and back were still bandaged. But she managed to creep along.

"Here, you! come in here."

She stood before him, her face red with anger.

"Nice stories I hear about you!"

She said nothing, but there was a threat in her eyes.

"After twenty-five years together! Aren't you ashamed?"

Then her anger exploded. He had struck her with a fence stake. He had almost broken her spine. He had called her vile names. He had cast dirt upon her reputation. He had abused their virtuous and respectable daughters. Worst of all, he had let the cattle go hungry until with great difficulty she had saved them by removing them to Witkuhn's.

The Steward saw that things were serious for Jons, that she had become a fury. Soft speech could not win her over. So he tried harshness. "Do you know what I am going to do with you? I am going to have you taken to jail."

She laughed at him. "Go ahead. And to-morrow I'll be walking past your house again."

"That's not so certain."

"Why not? He hasn't brought a charge against me, and he won't. For here in my blouse I have a doctor's certificate which says how badly he beat me

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and that it is only by a miracle that I am now alive. If any one goes to jail he will go. And I am going to live with my oldest daughter. She is going to marry a rich landowner. To-morrow the banns will be posted. Once I am away from here they can do as they please."

This was no longer defiance; it was mutiny. Few, in many years, had dared address him in this fashion.

"Erdma Baltruschat, I'm going to pretend that I haven't understood what you said. But let me tell you one thing: the day will come, and it will come soon, when you will consider yourself lucky to be able to crawl back to Jons on your knees. Let us hope that he will take you back when that day comes."

She bit her lips and swore that she would sooner drown herself in a pond than go back. And with that she limped out again on the road to Heydekrug, where the lawyer was to advise her how to protect herself against the imposition of the daughter and son-in-law for whom she was now about to sacrifice everything.

21

The money had to be turned over; there was no way to avoid that, for without payment you couldn't get the land. But the land was deeded to the daughter, by way of precaution, so that young Herr Schmidt might not abscond before the wedding. With the farm were to go the cows and pigs and

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household furnishings,—and they were needed, for the farm was bare. The contract was signed and the money was whisked out of sight as fast as a fly killed in the hand. Although Erdma had arranged that drinks be served, the atmosphere was anything but cheerful. The erstwhile owner thought he had thrown away fortune and estate, while young Herr Schmidt opined that half the price would have been more than enough. They did not come to blows only because Urta made eyes at both of them. To reward herself for this service she took a short stroll and met the young men with the scars. They followed cautiously until they reached a place in the road where friendliness could be combined with secrecy. Katrika, meanwhile, wanted to spend the night at the home of young Herr Schmidt's parents, for which she could not be blamed. So, Erdma went home alone.

Home? She would not know until morning if she had a home. The lawyer would have the deed of property transfer ready the next day. It provided exactly what she was to receive until the day of her death,—and even contained provisions going beyond her death. No less than ten cakes and six kegs of beer were to be served at her funeral, and the cross on her grave was to be of cast iron. Thus everything was arranged for the best. Yet she was not entirely happy. If Jons, for example, should be coming now down the road, how could she pass him without a word?

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She reached the long bridge across the boglands, and here she thought of that spring day twenty-five years earlier when she and Jons had moved into the colony. The cowslips had looked happily up from the blue water by the dam, and she had said to him, "The flowers are able to live without drowning, and so shall we." She had said just that. Lord, it might have been yesterday! "But what is the use of getting on in the world if in the end everything is to be lost?" In her ignorance it had seemed to her they would long since have passed over the mountain and that there would be no more quarrels. Yet of a sudden misunderstanding had come like a thief in the night and had destroyed everything, everything. Moreover, she was furious with Katrika, who had snatched the money out of her hands. The wretch had scarcely been able to wait until she had opened her blouse! "But to-morrow everything will be well," she thought. No one would be able to put her out of the house—the lawyer had attended to that—and the young couple had perforce acquiesced in everything. Only the signature was wanting. To-morrow at eleven they would meet again in Heydekrug, and the wedding would take place Sunday week.

Once back at Witkuhn's she felt she was going to be ill again. So much have I changed, was her thought. But it was not her back that was the cause of this weakness; it was the grief of having had to give up everything. Witkuhn saw what she was

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thinking, and tried to comfort her, but what could he do?

Two hours later Urta arrived with flushed cheeks and a disturbed air. She had met the Steward, and that lout had asked her to produce a certificate of good conduct. What did he mean? She was very busy packing her trunk, but she was also all tenderness to her harassed mother, insisting that Witkuhn find a cart and drive her himself to Heydekrug the next day, since to go twice over the long road on foot might be too much for her. Late that evening she knelt again beside her mother's bed, kissed her hands, and begged forgiveness for the wrong she had done and the wrong she might yet do. Erdma had no notion what she meant, but her heart was so near to breaking anyway that she wet the pillow with her tears. And in the morning, when Witkuhn was about to drive her to town, Urta began again, exactly as if she were saying good-by for ever.

This morning Erdma paid her little heed. She had eyes only for the home across the road. Would Jons let himself be seen? Everything seemed empty and silent. Not even Petrouschka's glistening body was in sight. Indeed, that body would not have glistened, for it was now dirty beyond recognition.

Punctually at eleven the cart stopped before the lawyer's house. She thought the young couple would be awaiting her arrival, but they were not there. They had not come by eleven-thirty, nor by noon, when the lawyer had to go to court, saying that

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he would not be back before two o'clock. Nor were Katrika and her betrothed there when he returned at two. "My office closes between two and three-thirty," he said; "but they may turn up in the meantime." Erdma sat on the stoop, her back filled with pain. Witkuhn suggested that she go to the nearest inn and lie down; but she would not move lest the young couple arrive in the meantime. He brought her rolls and *schnaps*, and they waited together. At six o'clock the clerk came out and said it was now too late to transact any business. He added that the document was there and the notary would certify it the next day or any time at all. So they had to go back. Erdma bound her headkerchief about her cheeks and mouth and said nothing. What was there to say? She was afraid to think, much less speak. Witkuhn too was silent. And thus they reached his house. What they found there was incredible. If you heard it ten times you would still not believe it.

The cows were gone. The pigs were gone. The beds were gone. All the other furniture from across the way was gone. Urta was gone. Even the wretched Yetta was gone. Witkuhn's hired girl, a good servant, wailed aloud when she saw their shocked faces. They had said it was by Erdma's order: otherwise she would have called neighbor Smailus, or some one else—and she glanced across at the Baltruschat house.

What had happened?

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Soon after eleven o'clock a cart had driven up. Katrika and young Schmidt, who were seated in it, explained that they had come to transfer everything that belonged to their future home. Their mother would be on hand soon to arrange things, and would be back a little later for her own belongings. Then they had loaded the furniture in front and the pigs behind, and had tied the cows to the tail of the cart, and had driven off. Urta had tipped her five marks. And oh, yes! They had left two letters on the table: she didn't know for whom, since the letters were not addressed.

Erdma's back stiffened and grew numb. The neighbor and the girl had to carry her into the bedroom where the two letters lay. Katrika wrote:

"My dear little mother,

"It gives me great pain to part from you. My betrothed, young Herr Schmidt, and his family wish it so. The Germans say it is not customary to have the mother dragged into the house as former owner of the property. In that case they say they would prefer to stop the wedding. The wedding will be held privately so I cannot invite you to it. That is truly a great sorrow for me. I have taken the cows and other things, for my betrothed, young Herr Schmidt, has it in writing. So a lawsuit will do no good. I thank you for everything you have done for me and will love you always.

"Your faithful daughter Katrika."

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And this was Urta's letter:

"Darling mummy,

"I know I have treated you very badly, but Katrika insisted. That is why I kept asking you yesterday and to-day to forgive me. I shall not stay with Katrika but go from Jugnaten immediately to Berlin. If in spite of my nice clothes I was not as poor as a church mouse and much poorer than Ulela once was I would take you with me now. But we would only get into each other's way. And so I advise you to get a divorce quickly and marry neighbor Witkuhn who has always loved you. When you think of it it is all like a sad book that must at least have a happy ending. Of course you can't go back to our wicked father. Let faithless Petrouschka stay with him. I won't have any more of her. Take good care of yourself darling mummy and don't be angry with me. Very soon I will send you something nice.

"Your Urta."

Thus ran the farewell letters of the two daughters.

22

Erdma wanted to lie down on her bed, for her legs were too feeble to carry her. At this moment Witkuhn came into the room with his coat on his arm. He said, "While your daughters were here I could let the servant sleep in your room, but now that they've gone the court wouldn't believe such a story,

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since she is after all dependent upon me. And although I am an old man, still I am suspected, and I should not like to make your future harder by staying alone under the same roof with you. Or as good as alone. So I am going to ask Smailus to put me up, and I shall stay with him as long as your good name demands it."

Suddenly Erdma realized that she no longer had a roof over her head, for she could not drive Witkuhn out of his own house. Knowing, however, that he was not to be dissuaded, she pretended to be of his mind, thanked him as he went out, and said she would go to sleep at once. No sooner had he left the house than she took up her stick and rose to her feet again by its help. She told the maid she felt the need of a breath of fresh air and went out of doors. The night was lovely. She did not know where to go. She had sworn to the Steward that she would jump into a pond. Such an oath is easier proffered than fulfilled. Yet what else was there for her? She stood in the log road and looked at her own home across the way.

"Strange," she thought, "that no one sees or hears anything of him." Since she had stolen his horse he could no longer ride; but he did not go by on foot, either. Even Petrouschka seemed to have vanished from the earth. She cast a glance at the ash trees whose berries were already half red. Darkness was falling and she could distinguish little clearly; but from the road she saw that the sunflowers were in

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bloom and that the wind had bent the stalks of the sweet peas. "If my back were not so lame," she thought, "I would climb over the fence and set them up again."

But she started for the pond.

It was she herself who had cut the turf which lay black and heavy with oil on the edge of the hole. Not alone, however, as in the days of her youth. They had been three, for three are usually necessary; and Jons had had the hardest job of the three. The afterglow lay like a flame upon the water. "If I jump in here," she thought, "he will believe for the rest of his life that I was living secretly with neighbor Witkuhn. And who will be there to deny it? If our neighbor spoke, Jons would kill him." And then it occurred to her that being killed was not so very bad: jumping into a pond was worse. "What would happen," she wondered, "if I spoke to him first and explained everything? He couldn't do any more than kill me." She became blissfully happy in the possession of this idea. Anything rather than drown! So she went back over her path.

She was no longer troubled by the thought of the daughters who had deserted her. Only the memory of the lost cows and pigs filled her with sorrow. "If I had at least one cow to lead," she thought, "then I could appear before him. But it is very hard to go and stand like a beggar on his threshold." And again she wanted to drown herself in the pond.

When she stood once more in the ash-lined path

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it was already night, and yet it is never quite night in July in the north countries. "If I don't find him at home," she said to herself, "I'll sit down before the fireplace and wait till he comes in." She moved slowly up the driveway to the gate. The watch-dog did not disturb her: indeed he could not since Jons had poisoned him when he bit Petrouschka. Or so Smailus' wife had told the hired girl. The gate was open. Why not go in? The cattle had long since gone. She herself had stolen them. Had he locked the outer door? How could he? She had the key. She lifted the latch and went into the hall. Something bright sprang out of the darkness and reached towards her. Then it placed itself before her and began to moan in a human voice. For joy? or sorrow? Who knows?

Her eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness and she could see Jons clearly as he came fully dressed through the bedroom door. She saw also that he was sober. Yet he looked very sleepy. She did not answer when he asked who was there, but crouched before the fireplace. He would come forward soon with upraised shovel or ax. But he did not.

First he opened the door wide in order that he might see better. Then he stood beside her and spoke: "Is it still your back, that you can't stand up?" No, it was no longer her back. Nor was it fear. It was the tears which she could not now hold back. Kneeling by the fireplace she put her fore-

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head against the brick and wept because she was there and because he raised neither a shovel nor an ax. How would she explain the bank book and the cows? And how explain Witkuhn, past and present? And that she had in very truth always been faithful to him? She knew not what to say, so she lay down upon the floor and cried.

Jons said, "Thank God the girls have gone."

"You know, then?" she said, looking up.

"I saw everything being loaded this morning," he said.

"And you did not give them a beating?"

"I have already given one beating," he said, and he sat down beside her by the hearth.

She raised her head and rested it on his knee. He put his hand on her hair. For a long time they remained this way. Finally she had to tell him—about the neighbor, first. She hesitated, tried to begin, and could not. "Our neighbor," she said, "our neighbor" —and could go no further.

"It doesn't matter about our neighbor," he said; "for you are here again."

She knew then that he had forgiven her everything, whatever might have happened. Yet she did not want it on her mind even an hour longer. Rising suddenly she sat down beside him and told him the story of the hymn-book, the miracle it had effected in her youth, and that all that had been left behind them both with the coming of age. She told him

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too that Witkuhn had gone to Smailus' to pass the night there.

"You are here again," he said, and to that he would add nothing. They were ready for bed, but there was no bed.

"I have been sleeping on straw, under a horse blanket," he said. The horse was gone, but the blanket was there.

She was ashamed. "When we started, we had at least our bedclothes," she said.

"Oh, God!" he groaned. "The stock is gone, and most of the furniture, and all of our savings"—and when he said "all of our savings," he sobbed so that her heart was rent. "But the buildings are still up, and we have the field, and the potatoes are doing well. And the Steward promised that the horse would be found; and he will lend us money, too. We will begin over again from the beginning; that is all."

Erdma felt her youth return when she heard him speak these words.

Then they crept quietly into their cold bed and covered themselves as best they could with the scant horse blanket. And they were not cold for the night was mild, and they could warm one another. Lying there Erdma thought, "How happy I am!" Her back would soon be well and she would then be able to do work enough for three. Contentment would come as it had come before: no, it was already here,

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for Jons was murmuring drowsily, "You are here again."

Petrouschka had thrust her head between her paws and was dreaming of a tub filled with warm water and white suds, and a thorough scrubbing.

And if I know Erdma, the dream came true next day.

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THE HIRED GIRL

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THE HIRED GIRL

It was the first day of July, and the day's work had already been done when Marinka Tamoszus drove into the village. Her father had driven her over himself in the cart; but not, as it happens, from their own home. They had just left Herr Westphal's farm where Marinka had worked as hired girl for one year and then for two years had managed the dairy. There she had attracted the attention of old Enskys from Ussainen. He had observed her carefully each time that he had come to deliver his milk, and had recognized in her a model housewife, pointing her out first to his wife and then to his son Jurris. Thereupon, with the enthusiastic concurrence of both, he had made an agreement with her father, as a result of which she had given notice to Westphal and had gone to work for old Enskys.

But this is far from the end of the story. It is rather only a happy beginning. For if the attraction turned out to be reciprocal, it was possible that a marriage might be celebrated towards mid-October, after the last potatoes had been gathered. At least such had been the understanding reached with her father. And she, Marinka, had been nothing loth, being minded of that disagreeable scold, her stepmother, with whom she found life impossible. Nor was there

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any point in being kitchen maid forever on a large farm. In the end one only got talked about.

Dressed in her Sunday clothes, with a brown taffeta apron, her braids plaited with green ribbons, Marinka sat blond and plump and demure beside her wizened father who whipped his horses smartly, for he wished to drive up before the house with a flourish. He already knew the Enskys farm. She, on the other hand, had never been there and was looking forward to her new life like a traveler embarking upon an ocean voyage. She stared neither ahead nor around her, and there was little in her expression to denote pleasurable anticipation. Nor did she ask "Is this it? Is that it?" whenever they came in sight of a farm. But each time that the cart passed a new driveway she breathed more easily. For she had still a little respite.

At length, however, he turned a corner and her future home lay before her in the afterglow. Four black-and-white cows were ruminating in the pasture. She saw at one experienced glance that they were splendid milkers. There was a garden full of flowers and a paved courtyard. A threshing machine stood before the massive barn. In her excitement she noticed little else. Only the brown nets drying on the picket fence really surprised her, for she had never before been in a fishing community. In the doorway stood the old people with their son Jurris. There was a hired man, too, and a woman who worked by the day. Because of their presence the

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welcome could not be over-cordial. For their part, however, they suspected something and grimaced secretly at one another. When there is a young son in the house and a maid drives up behind two horses, with her father as coachman, one has a right to suspicion!

Jurris was just as shy as she was. One would not have expected it of him, for he had recently come home from the cuirassiers and he still wore his blue and white cap over his left ear. But scarcely had he given her his hand when he hastened to busy himself with her trunk. Between them, he and the hired man carried it into the house. Anything to avoid speaking to her.

He did not, as a matter of fact, look like a cuirassier. Rather more like a lancer, in truth, for he was tall, supple and slightly round-shouldered. Eyes blue and calm. Very little beard as yet.

Old Tamoszus did not unharness his horses, for it was more than three miles to Piktaten, where his farm lay, and he planned to be at home that night. But he ate a bit of smoked eel and washed it down with a glass of smooth raspberry wine. He felt with satisfaction that Marinka was going into a good home, and that the five hundred thalers which he was able to give her as dowry would be well spent. After he had driven away Marinka sat in her room and wept.

When working, however, one is more likely to laugh than to cry, and the next day she was quite

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cheerful again. The cows stood as quietly over the milk-pails as if she had fondled them for weeks. She swirled the pigs' food in a wide arc so that it dropped right under their hungry snouts.

Enskys' wife followed closely after Marinka, but in such a way as not to be seen by her. During the noonday meal she whispered to her husband, "We have chosen wisely: she is an angel."

Old Enskys folded his wrinkled hands and said, dubious still, "God grant it."

The thought occurred to both of them that they could now pass the autumn of their lives in peace, though they were still no more than fifty years old.

Marinka feigned not to know that she was being watched and talked about. She worked like one who loves work, with her mind solely upon what she was doing. She liked her prospective mother-in-law, who was a kind-hearted, easy-going woman and not inclined to impress upon one that she was mistress. For the time being, however, the old man puzzled her. His demeanor was as modest as that of a cottager, but his glance was sharp and he grumbled about small things. Two or three times he expected her to know things which she could not possibly have learned yet. That, however, might have been mere thoughtlessness.

Jurris sat beside her, silent and very erect, saying nothing day after day, until the hired man and the servant grew even more suspicious than they had been before. Marinka did not mind, for her

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thoughts were anywhere except upon Jurris. She was slightly curious about him, wondering how he was going to begin. But he preferred not to begin. And as time wore on she began to fear that she might be sent home again. She was also afraid of something a great deal worse—but she did not allow herself to think of that.

In order to sell their milk to the best advantage, the five large farmers of the village had concluded a rental agreement with her former employer, Herr Westphal, and delivered every day at his dairy a certain quantity of milk from the surrounding farms. They turned up there in successive weeks, and thus Marinka knew them all. She knew their wives and children even better, for generally the farmers themselves drove the milk-carts only when they had other errands in Augustenhof.

The week after Marinka's arrival it was Jozup's turn. Jozup Wilkat, who ran a farm with his mother, was a dark young man below average height, with a thick mustache, and eyebrows which met and gave him a strangely sinister appearance. Their farm, which was in fact prosperous and well managed, was known in the neighborhood as the *Wilkija*, the Wolf's Nest. First of course because of the name, for Wilkat is Lithuanian for *werewolf*. And then, too, because of the three sons who had grown up without a father, had fought among themselves from the time they grew up, until their mother, whose favorite Jozup was, had thrown the two older

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ones out. They were now shipping clerks in Berlin. Jozup, for his part, was merely waiting for a suitable wife before taking over the farm himself. All the girls in Augustenhof were after him, but he concerned himself very little with them. Even at Marinka he had only stared mutely, barely allowing her time to enter his milk in her book before he was off again.

People said of him that he was a *bedraugus*,—a man without a friend. This might have been appropriate earlier. Now, however, when he went to get Enskys' milk in the evening, he stayed a long time in the barn with Jurris, smoking a cigar with him and delaying his departure as late as he could. For it mattered little that it took an hour and a half to get to Augustenhof at a walk: they seemed always to have been bosom friends. It might have been on the fourth evening that he approached Marinka, who was loading the milk-cans, and addressed her. "Yesterday Herr Westphal stopped me and said to tell you to come back to Augustenhof whenever you had time."

Marinka flushed and said, "What have I to do in Augustenhof? I don't work there any more."

Jozup answered, "He said there was a settlement still to be made."

"Everything was settled before I left," said Marinka.

On the following Saturday he came to her again and said, "Herr Westphal was at the dairy yesterday

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and said there was one item he wasn't clear about. He wants to talk to you. To-morrow, Sunday, is my last night. Would you trust me enough to go with me?"

Marinka's heart beat violently. Looking at Jurris, who stood quietly by, she said, "If I positively must go I had rather go when it is our turn. Herr Westphal can certainly wait another week."

Jozup's eyebrows knit more darkly than ever. He climbed up on his seat and drove off.

Jurris stood staring after him. Marinka was vexed that he still did not speak to her. After all, she was here on trial. What would be the outcome if things went on hanging in the air like this? And so she did something which was quite opposed to her retiring nature, and for which she had not previously found courage. Going close to him she said, "Perhaps you would be good enough to take me with you?"

Had he made a curt and peevish answer, or otherwise shown displeasure, she would have known that she was soon to pack her trunk. But not at all. He turned towards her. A kind, almost a happy smile, came into his face and he said, "Will you come fishing with me, too?"

She knew suddenly what he felt, and she knew that she could stay here with her trunk for the rest of her life. She wanted to run away and cry by herself, but she found the strength to say with a smile, "You never went fishing before."

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"I kept waiting for you," he replied.

"If you had asked your mother she would have let me go," said Marinka.

"Yes, I might have done that," he said; "but I kept thinking you were too busy."

"I'm busy enough," was her answer; "but I'd like to see how fish are caught."

He led her over to the brown nets smelling of tar, which hung on the fence, and he explained everything to her.

She listened without hearing a word. Happiness stopped up her ears. The weight and darkness which had filled her mind were now gone. She was soothed by the vague impression of a mild summer evening, of brown nets and green fences and colored flowers, of birds singing to him and her, of a watchdog wagging his tail against her, and a kindly affectionate young man who now belonged to her. Happy as an angel, she walked beside him. If he had taken her into his arms and flown away with her to heaven, she would not have been in the least surprised.

Naturally, they walked in the garden together now. He showed her the wallflower and the storksbill, and she showed him the veronica and the sweet william. But of the rue they dared not speak and passed it silently by.

2

Two days later Jurris said to Marinka early in the morning, "Mother says we may go fishing together."

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"Who will milk the cows?" she asked.

And he answered, "She will do that herself."

As Marinka loaded the net into the cart she felt the glances of the others upon her and was covered with embarrassment. She took nothing to eat with her, nor did she say to any one, "Now I am going," but slipped away as if she had been a criminal.

Jurris pulled the cart and she pushed from behind. That was easy, for the wheels seemed to turn of themselves. The way to the harbor led straight through the fields for more than half an hour. Except for a reddish haze such as lies over the meadows in the morning, there was nothing to be seen. Then the blue of the water appeared high above the reeds and rushes, while between the water and the sky the sand dunes of the lowlands gleamed in the distance like a ribbon of pale yellow silk. Marinka thought, "How beautiful my home will be!" She wanted to speak but dared not, for Jurris, walking on ahead of her, did not once turn around. And thus they drew near the shore.

There were sheds here to shelter the boats when storms threatened. Now, however, in the tranquil summer weather, the boats were not even brought up on shore but swayed, tied fast to their stakes, between the banks of grass and reeds. Many people had the right to go fishing here, but nobody was about. The harvest season had begun and they were all very busy in the fields. Thinking of this, Marinka said to herself anxiously that even Jurris had absented himself only for her sake.

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He was now unloading the net from the cart and she helped him, although there was no need of help. Not until they were far out over the blue, where the rudders splashed and the waves foamed, did he ask her to help him cast the net. She understood at once what was to be done, and straightway the *pluden*—the light pieces of wood which hold the net up—floated around them in an arc. After that they rested for a while and the sun began to beat down.

"You have no kerchief," he said. "You will get a headache." And he brought forth an oilskin cap for her to put on. But she did not want to, fearing that he might laugh at her appearance. She said as much to him. That made him laugh in anticipation. "Why," he said, "I'll see you a thousand times in an oilskin cap."

And without heeding what she was saying, she retorted, "But then we'll be married."

No sooner were the words spoken than she was so embarrassed that she would have liked to jump into the water. "O Lord! O Lord!" she thought. "Now he will think me bold and forward." She felt that her face had grown crimson and was getting redder and redder, so she turned her back upon him and retreated into herself.

Sitting at the rudder, he spoke: "Marinka, turn around."

But she could not. For suddenly the thought came to her, "It will not be; it cannot be. It is too beau-

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tiful for me; I am not worthy." Her heart seemed about to break, and she began to cry bitterly.

Jurris got up from his bench and sat down so close to her that her back pressed against his chest. It must be that she really did not want him, he said; for otherwise the thought of marriage could not make her cry this way.

But she only wept the harder. Then from behind he placed his arm around her neck, so that her head lay back against his shoulder. She turned a little towards him, in order to avoid displaying her wet face to the bright sun. With her face pressed thus against his coat, she grew quiet once more.

"Oh, if he would only kiss me!" she thought.

But he did not kiss her.

Then it came time to look after the net. The catch brought up very little. A few breams; a few red-eyes. That was all. Yet they were not greatly concerned, and in the end they even laughed over it.

When they drew the cart homeward she no longer pushed from behind as in the morning. She walked beside him now and helped him pull it along. With the best will in the world, however, there was nothing to be drawn. He placed his free arm about her waist, so that her arm was caught against the pole. That seemed very funny to them and they laughed a great deal.

Once home again, they were quite serious. When his mother set their noonday meal on the table Ma-

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rinka, abashed at being served by her, kissed the sleeve and hem of her dress.

The old woman said with an affectionate smile, "What you two children caught wasn't very much, and yet my Jurris made a good catch."

Old Enskys, however, went about with a distrustful and uneasy look, so that even Marinka became timorous again.

"Does he know anything about me?" she wondered. Still, if he did, would he have taken her into his home on trial? The question reassured her, and she went peacefully about her work.

There was no reason this week why Jozup Wilkat should appear at the farm, for it was another person's turn to collect and deliver the milk. Nevertheless, he was at the Enskys' morning and night. Once he came over to borrow a gimlet which had to be brought back. Another time he had run out of axle-grease. In the end he came with no excuse at all, sitting down near Jurris on a beam and staying sometimes long enough to smoke three pipefuls. It was extraordinary, considering that he was the one who had been dubbed *bedraugus*.

Jurris could not understand whence this new friendship had sprung, for they had known one another at least twenty years. But since it chose to fall upon him suddenly from heaven, he accepted it without demur. Jozup, whom every one considered

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refractory and unfriendly, was not so bad after all. He knew a great many songs and stories, and the answers to his riddles were funny enough to make you split your sides with laughter. Jurris' parents often joined them, but Marinka seemed to shrink from him. Not that he was repellent to her. She rather enjoyed looking at him as he came and went with his strapping legs and his head held proudly high. But the sense of discomfort which even in Augustenhof she had felt when he drove up with the milk, still oppressed her.

She would say to herself from time to time, "One of these days he is going to hurt me." However, she had always been a bit afraid of men since she had learned how powerless a poor girl is to resist their stronger will. But she had only to look at Jurris in order to know that she was well protected, and to understand that Jozup would never be allowed to come too close to her.

One day late in the afternoon Jozup paused at the garden fence and called to her, "Here, you—look at me!"

She did not wish to, for she was pulling up carrots for the next day's dinner; but she had to, nevertheless.

"What makes you so touchy?" he demanded. "I won't bite you. I only bite meat."

"I am the hired girl here," she replied; "and I have work to do."

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"When you talk of being the hired girl," he said, "even the hens laugh. I know perfectly well how soon you will be mistress here."

"If you know it," she answered, "then you had better wait until I have the right to talk to you."

"It isn't part of your duty to be dumb," he said. "Besides, I have a message for you."

She was frightened, but she did not show it. "If it is from Herr Westphal again," she said, "tell him that when it is our turn I will come—and not before."

But it was something else this time.

"My mother's bones ache," he said. "Somebody told her you had a healing touch, and she wants you to use it on her. At the same time, you could have a look at our farm."

All this embarrassed her. "Whoever said that about my touch," she answered, "was lying, for I know nothing about it. And I know even less what there is on your farm that I ought to see."

With that she turned back to the carrots and looked at him no more. He stood still for a while, and it seemed to her that he was looking right through her clothes. Then, wishing her good evening, he moved on.

"Good Lord!" she said to herself; "is he after me too?" But that was impossible. If it was true, why should he have made friends with Jurris?

After a bit she heard Jurris' footsteps coming down the center path and her heart flew to meet him. She thought, "How can one love a person so

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quickly!" But she did not look up and merely pulled at the carrots more industriously.

Pausing behind her he said, "Can't you ever do enough? It is half dark and bedtime, and here you are, still working."

She stood up and wiped her knife on her apron. "You mustn't think," she said, "that I am trying to show off before you and your parents. But when I think that this earth on which I kneel will perhaps soon be my earth, then the evening seems like morning and work like play."

He said, "We haven't yet really actually become engaged."

"No," she said, "we haven't." And she bent over to pick up the basket of carrots. But he took it from her hands and led her along the path to the ash tree under which there stood a bench for rest at noonday and in quiet evening hours.

It was nearly night under the drooping branches, and any one looking for them would be seen at a distance coming down the brighter pathway. Putting the basket on the ground, Jurris sat down beside her. He held one of her hands already, and now he took the other, too.

"Do you know what Jozup said to-day?" he asked, by way of opening speech. "When we are married he would like to be best man."

She could scarcely tell him that she was afraid of Jozup, for he had not hurt her in any way. And so she said, "We haven't reached that point yet."

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"Why not?" he asked. "If you want me, I want you. I have always wanted you."

She answered, "I do want you."

They sat very quietly for a while. She put her head on his shoulder and he put his cheek against her head. And she thought, "Why does he never kiss me?"

Not that she was dissatisfied, or thought him awkward,—but she longed for him so! She moved her head very gently farther and farther back until first her cheek was against his cheek and then her mouth was very close to his mouth. He had to do it then, and it was like a shudder and like a shock. And it was like a frightful memory, and like a new fear, too. The happiness which followed was the more poignant for this fear. She no longer knew how much of her soul or how much of her body was hers. She wanted to give more and more of herself to him; she wanted more and more to belong to him.

Suddenly she seemed to hear a sound nearby, and although no one had come down the path she sprang up and said, "Come: it is no longer safe here." She wished him a hasty good night and ran straight to the storehouse where her room was. But she could not sleep for thinking it would not be long before he followed her.

In the adjoining room the servant was snoring heavily. He need have no fear of her! She listened and listened for the sound of the latch, but it did not move. She seemed to hear steps moving softly in the

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yard, going back and forth unceasingly between the dwelling house and the storehouse.

"The poor boy!" she thought. "He doesn't dare. I must make things easier for him."

She got up and opened the door a hand's breadth. Fortunately the space was no wider, for upon peering out she saw instantly that it was not Jurris but his father who paced restlessly in the summer night, and contrary to custom and justice kept watch lest the lovers should be united.

3

Contrary to custom and justice. For when a bride who is on trial has come to an understanding with the bridegroom, they retire at once and are left undisturbed. But here it was different. Jurris came in from the field the next morning to get a jug of cold brown beer—for those who were mowing and binding out of doors were overcome with thirst. On his way out he met his father who had been waiting for him in the hall. (His father had retired from active work.) "Come in here a minute," said the old man.

Jurris set the jug down in the shade. When he went into the room he saw that the large table had been covered with a white towel. Two candles stood burning, and between them lay the prayer-book.

The old man was bareheaded and had taken off his spectacles. He seemed nervous and mysterious.

"Take your cap off," he said.

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Jurris was surprised, but he obeyed.

His father spoke: "When Marinka was about to come into the house I told you that people who are going to live together their whole life long must learn to know each other. But first I made you promise that you would not go too near her so long as the minister had not given you his blessing. And you gave me your word."

"I didn't know what it was, father," interrupted Jurris, "to have my bride living so close."

"And the men of the law know even less, I suppose," his father said, "since they are Germans. And perhaps God has sent the Germans a different message than He sent us. Only a little while ago at the Assizes in Tilsit an old and honorable farmer, who had never in all his life strayed a hair's breadth from the path of virtue, was sentenced to a year in the penitentiary—not jail, my son, but the penitentiary—because his son and his bride, who had been in the house on trial just as Marinka is, had lain together under his roof. He wept and swore that it all happened honorably, since the wedding was to take place in the autumn, and since during the harvest two good hands could not be spared. But those merciless Germans took away the old man's good name and locked him up with thieves and murderers."

"It isn't possible!" cried Jurris indignantly. "That would be a most terrible outrage!"

"The Germans call it justice," said his father; "and amongst themselves they punish each other in

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that way. Now, I should not like to go to the workhouse in my old age, for there are spies everywhere. And because I saw yesterday evening how far things had gone, I decided that there are but two ways in which to save myself from sorrow and disgrace: either I will send her back temporarily to her parents—"

"That wouldn't be right," cried Jurris, horrified. "It would look as if we didn't want her here."

"—or you must promise me here, on the Holy Word of God, that you will keep away from her until the day of the wedding. And no one, not even your mother, is to know of this."

Difficult as it was for Jurris, there was nothing else to do. Putting his hand on the prayer-book between the candles, he took the oath demanded by his father. And he also swore, precisely as his father dictated, that God might visit him with scourge and death if he violated his oath.

And then he took out to the field the jug of beer which in the meantime had grown tepid

Marinka stood panting for breath in skirt and smock. She seized the jug as if it had been a pitcher of joy; as he watched her, it seemed to him that she drank sorrow from it.

At noon, when the mowers were resting in the scant shade of the two willow trees, he turned so deliberately away from her that she looked at him in surprise. She bethought herself that there were others present, and was reassured. On the way home he did

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not walk by her side, but made a great show of throwing out the rocks that lay in the ruts along the road. And thus it went on until she actually became ill.

Yet, as they had already plighted their troth, she did not doubt the sincerity of his intent. It was only the great yearning for him which made her ill.

The Monday evening arrived on which the Enskys' cart was to take the five farmers' milk to Augustenhof. It had long been agreed that Marinka should go with Jurris in order finally to see Herr Westphal as he had so often requested. She could go with a light heart, she told her future mother-in-law, for she had always kept the books most carefully; and some error of the Swiss, her successor, was certainly the cause of any irregularity which might have been discovered. Nevertheless her heart was really very heavy,—and it had nothing to do with bookkeeping.

She dressed with care, weaving bright ribbons through her braids and donning a silk sash the mottoes on which she herself had embroidered. And whenever she thought of the two-hour ride alone with Jurris, through a world of rose twilight, all the anxiety which had tortured her disappeared. But alas! When the hour for collecting the milk arrived, Jurris was nowhere to be found. The milk-cans belonging to the farm were loaded on, and those of the other farmers had long been waiting. Yet calling him was all in vain.

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"Then you will have to go alone, my child," said his mother.

She was startled and reluctant, and she shed more tears than the little journey was worth.

The old man approached and, as was now his wont, began at once to grumble. "What's all this nonsense?" he said. "You seem to be afraid because you don't know how to handle horses."

Of course that touched Marinka's feelings to the quick. For where is there a Lithuanian, man or woman, who does not look upon horses as playmates? Lithuanian boys and girls learn to ride and drive even before they have learned to walk.

Marinka said nothing. Biting her lips, she mounted to the seat and drove out of the yard.

Enskys' wife was sorry that her husband had spoken so sharply, and followed the cart out, intending if she succeeded in catching up with it to offer Marinka a little consolation. But she did not overtake her. It was only in the distance that she saw the cart stop at the Wilkats', and saw the old woman mount nimbly, despite her paralytic limbs, and whisper Lord-knows-what into Marinka's ear.

She was annoyed and thought, "What can that old she-wolf have to say to Marinka?"

An hour later Jurris turned up. He had gone to the bay to look after the eel-pots, he said by way of excuse. And when she reproached him and continued to heckle him, he said merely, "Ask father."

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Father apparently knew nothing. Both men went off to bed.

She, for her part, could not sleep until her sweet daughter had come home again. She got some supper ready, left the lamp burning on the mantel, shut the door to keep out the gnats, and sat down under the linden trees. The moon came up, and the night breeze caressed her as if it were Slinka, her old cat. She waited and waited, and still Marinka did not come. Towards half past eleven she finally heard a cart coming slowly, slowly nearer. The wheels made a grinding noise and the axles turned listlessly.

"She must have gone to sleep," thought the old woman, "and the horses are taking it easy."

When she saw Marinka on the seat, staring wide-eyed at the moon, and saw her climb down without a word of greeting, she knew that she had not been asleep, but that something had happened. Caressing her, she said, "You are tired, little daughter. Eat something and then lie down. I will unharness the horses later."

Marinka let her have her way.

When Jurris' mother returned, she was sitting near the fireplace eating, but apparently without satisfaction,—following instructions. Under the lamplight her face was very pale, except for two bright spots in her cheeks.

The old woman embraced her and said, "Tell me what happened."

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Marinka answered, staring vaguely into space, "It didn't balance."

"How much out of the way was it?"

Marinka thought a moment and then answered, "It was more than fifty marks short."

Jurris' mother laughed and said, "I'll send it early in the morning and add fifty for interest. Wieszpatis can take it and lump it."

Marinka spoke with intensity: "The money doesn't matter. He said so right away. It's the suspicion, the shame of having that Swiss able to say 'a careless wench used to have my job.' Or Westphal might say even worse."

The old woman chided her for worrying about nothing at all. Yet in her heart she was glad that God in his mercy had given her Jurris such a decent woman.

She said, "To-morrow I will take the milk in, and when I see your Herr Westphal I'll give him a piece of my mind for having brought shame upon a respectable girl. Yes, that's what I'll do. And I shan't be the least bit afraid to do it."

When she began to speak Marinka's countenance still wore a startled expression. Then Marinka smiled slightly, as one smiles at the words of children. For never a man or woman reproached Herr Westphal to his face. At the most one approached him with entreaty. Not without reason had people

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far and wide named him the *Wieszpatis*, which signifies Lord and Master. Almighty God goes by that name.

4

The next morning Marinka's behavior was almost normal. She kissed the old woman's sleeve and gave Jurris her hand. But she did not ask why he had hidden away the day before. In fact she asked no questions at all, but went quietly about her work.

The days flew by. The rye was brought in dry; the peas and barley likewise. It was a year blessed as few are. No weeds and no blight—nothing frost-bitten and nothing husked.

"The gods have been propitious," said the mother, "since the child has been with us."

And the father said, "If only nothing—" But he did not finish the sentence.

Things were no longer as they had been between Marinka and Jurris. They were friendly towards each other and spoke freely of matters of momentary interest; but neither now sought to be alone with the other. Each grieved in his own fashion. When Marinka thought herself unobserved she watched his face with questioning and anxious eyes. And he hovered around her like a thief, fearful of touching her. Nothing further was said of the approaching marriage. Enskys' wife merely mentioned the dowry one day, asking what Marinka's parents were willing to give her.

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Jozup came day after day. As soon as the day's work was done he would appear. The two friends sat outside the stable, smoking, or eating green apples.

Once, as Marinka was driving the cows in from the pasture, Jozup appeared at her side and began a conversation.

"Have you already given your parents-in-law the piece of bridal linen?" he asked. "And have you put rue in it?"

"Why should I do that?" she asked. "I am the hired girl here, and nothing else."

"You've said that before," he returned. "It's time you paid a little attention to me, for I am about ready to invite your wedding guests."

"I know of no wedding," she answered.

He laughed. "But it is already beating like hot brandy in our veins. I lie awake all night thinking of the bride and the bridal night, although I am to be nothing more than best man. As for Jurris, who sweats blood whenever he remembers that he is going to lose his virginity, I am not thinking of him—but of you, my darling. You don't look as if you would be greatly offended at being tupped up in a haystack. But your honorable bridegroom won't do it, eh? Perhaps he'll find somebody to do it for him."

The path was narrow and she was forced to listen to his horrible words. As she was on the point of rebuking him she thought suddenly, "Perhaps he knows more about me than is good for me. Other-

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wise he wouldn't be so bold." She grew so much afraid of him that she lowered her head and let him say what he wished. To Jurris she said nothing, although in her heart she would have liked him to drive Jozup from the farm with a horsewhip.

The days that followed were filled with fresh heartache, harder to bear than all that had gone before. She would run from her work to hide in the barn, where she would pore listlessly over the sheaves for blighted wheat kernels. She would wander away to the village seeking a savin tree for the precious oil of its leaves. She would scald her feet in boiling water. At night she would fall to her knees and pray, but during the day she wore a courageous expression. She deceived them all except Jurris' mother, who was not to be deceived. One day the old woman put her arms about Marinka and said, "Dear child, you have been with us six weeks and I have tried you out well. When I say to you that I could wish nothing better for Jurris, you know how I feel about it. But men play such evil tricks upon us women that often we become unhappy without knowing why. And if this is what has happened to you, be brave and try to make right what can still be righted. It isn't a question of deception—but if you are to deceive the boy you must be sure you love him."

Marinka could not fathom the meaning of her words, yet they had the desired effect upon her. For now she ceased to kneel despondently upon the floor, and began to wonder how she could resume her in-

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timacy with Jurris. It was not easy, for he no longer frequented the garden after work, and he seemed never to want to take a stroll with her.

The next Sunday, towards twilight, she heard him say to his father, "I haven't been down to the bay for a long time. I must look after that boat and the shed."

If all had been well between them he would have said to her, "Come along," and would have walked out hand in hand with her through the gate. Instead, he slipped around the barn and crept through the fences, looking back furtively to see if he had been observed.

She said to herself, "I'll do it!" She followed him, but at a considerable distance, so that his sharp eyes might not recognize her. If they did, he might take another way home. She walked about a quarter of an hour and then sat down beside the road and waited. Darkness was falling and all about her the crickets were chirping. She was ashamed to think that she was pursuing him with dishonorable motives. If her thoughts had been as before of a great and pure love, she would have had no conscience in the matter. But now that need was urging her, she seemed to herself an impostor. Yet she felt withal that her love was greater and purer than before. True, no one would have believed it: she herself found it hard to believe.

After a long time she heard his steps. She would willingly have run away at the sound, but she was

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trembling so that she did not have the strength to rise. He stopped before her and said, "Who is there?"

She asked, "How do you happen to be here?"

Then he knew who it was, and he said, "You are safe enough here; but it isn't proper for young girls to wander alone in the fields on Sunday night."

"What am I to do?" she asked. "I have no friend among the girls, and the person who ought to look after me doesn't do it."

"Do you mean me?" he asked.

And she answered, "No; I mean Jozup."

Thereupon he sat down beside her and said, "You are right to reproach me, Marinka. I know I haven't behaved very well towards you. But—what could I do? My father insisted, and made me take a solemn oath."

She shrugged her shoulders. "What is an oath?" she asked. "I would swear five thousand oaths for you, and if they happened to be false I would only laugh."

"This was not an ordinary oath," he said, "of the kind men take in court. I had to swear on my death and yours, and there were two candles burning to right and left of the prayer-book."

She said, "Your father might find better things to do than make two lovers unhappy." And then she asked him if that had been the reason why he hid from her on the day of the drive to Augustenhof.

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When he said "Yes," she put her head down on his knees and sobbed. She no longer remembered what she had purposed. She cried and cried until she could cry no more. Jurris was able finally to raise her head and take her into his arms. He kissed the tears from her cheeks and wept with her. She did not want him to kiss her, for she felt now that she was not worthy of him. Yet she was so happy to be with him again that she did not have the strength to resist him.

They went home with their arms about each other. Jurris said, "Now I have stopped worrying about you, for I know no evil can come to us." Her heart smote her, for she knew that evil had to come. If not to-day, then very soon. And whether it meant life or death no longer mattered. Again she made light of the oath, and this time to good effect. She kissed him again and again, and saw with delight that he was overcome and made helpless by her kisses. When they reached the farm everything was still and dark. He could not tear himself away from her, and she was beginning to think that he would ask her to let him go with her into the silence of her room, when suddenly he drew himself out of her arms and fled into the house as though the devil were at his heels.

Kneeling beside her bed as she had knelt so many nights, she prayed and struggled with herself while listening and listening for the latch to click. In the next room the housemaid was sound asleep; but even

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if she were not, what difference could it make now? Marinka got up from her knees. Still Jurris had not come. Silently she took the difficult way to his room.

5

That was on Sunday. The following Saturday Jurris went into his father's room and said, "Father, I beg you to let the wedding take place somewhat earlier."

Looking up from the Bible which he was reading, the old man said, "You have broken your oath, then?"

And Jurris answered, "Yes, I have broken my oath."

The father burst into a flame of anger and cried, "May God strike you for that!"

Jurris bowed his head and said, "Perhaps God will forgive me, for it was indeed too hard."

The old man shouted, "No; God will not forgive you. Even less than I forgive you for having brought such trouble upon me." And he paced the room frantically in his slippers, like a madman.

After a while he went on, "Of course the wedding must take place earlier. As soon as possible. It must take place in order that a millstone may not meanwhile be hung about my neck. But I say this to you: Sorrow and distress will sit at table with you and death will stand behind you, because you have

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so little respected the will of God and have respected your father's will even less."

Jurris went sadly from the room and spoke to no one except Marinka, who stood waiting in alarm. To her he said as he came forward, "He will do it."

Straightway a great commotion arose in the house, for the wedding preparations began at once. The banns were posted at the registrar's office and with the minister. Jozup appeared suddenly one morning bright and early: his horse was bedecked with ribbons and he himself wore ribbons on his shoulders and on his hat brim. Jurris' mother reached up to him a long list of the guests who were to be invited to the wedding. Marinka was sent to draw a festive drink. When she raised the glass to him he seized it and her hands so eagerly that she was unable to free herself. Holding her in a fast grip he said, "If I ride away now you will have to come too, and you will never escape again."

She was really alarmed, and answered, "Then you would be a very wicked wedding messenger."

He drank, and rode away laughing. Yet almost until evening she felt his burning hands.

It was just at the season when the oats were being brought in and when the first plowing was being done, but both had to be deferred because of the many things to be done in the house.

The people of the village marveled, and said to one another, "Marinka has been there such a short

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time. Do you suppose they were already lovers before she came?"

It was fortunate that the old man never learned that he had attained the precise opposite of his intention. The blow might have killed him. But Jurris heard it. Jozup took care to cram it down his throat. And although there was no reason to worry, it grieved him, and he fretted lest it be an ill omen. Jozup saw to it that fresh coals were heaped upon the fire of his embarrassment.

Marinka was there to comfort him. "When two people love one another," she said, "no misfortune can touch them and they need feel no guilt. God is near: He cleanses their souls of perjury and of even worse things." She had quite recovered. When she held him now secretly in her arms she forgot everything, even that she had recently been so greatly distraught. She did the work of three, and whatever the load she had to carry—pots or pails or sheaves—in her grateful hands it was no more than a toy.

Jurris, for his part, was possessed by idleness. No matter how much she talked to him, his work was never more than half done. And if there had not, fortunately, been a hired man about, the oats might perhaps have rotted in the field. He was eternally loafing about the bay. At a time when no one with farm work to do could think of going fishing, he was busy morning and night out there on the bay.

The early autumn rains set in, and often he came home from the shore wet to the marrow, but with

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an empty net. His one thought was not to fish, but to be away from the house.

Marinka would kiss his hands and say, "Jurris, Jurris: nobody is going to hurt you!" But even this did not help much.

One morning the *aulaukis*—the southwest wind—was blowing strong. Fishermen, particularly when rain goes with it, do not like this wind. Looking out, Marinka thought, "To-day, at any rate, he won't go out." Yet Jurris was the one person not to be found at breakfast, in the yard, or in the field. The morning went by and Marinka wondered why he was not back. When he did not come back for lunch, his mother too grew alarmed. Marinka could no longer restrain herself. She jumped up from table and ran down to the bay. As she hurried in a straight line across the fields she realized that it was no longer a mere wind but a storm. The rain pelted her like hail. When she was in sight of the shed she saw that the door was blowing open and shut. The row-boat was gone. Nothing could be seen on the waters of the bay, for the rain clouds hung low over everything. But the waves which dashed high on the shore seemed ready to devour any one who approached too near, and the rushes wailed plaintively in a human voice.

The other boats had been pulled up on shore out of reach of the waves. "Now I must go out to meet him," Marinka thought. But when she succeeded in dragging a boat to the water's edge the waves struck

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with such force against its side that it almost keeled over. She realized then that she was frantic, and that to go out meant death. She sank to her knees on the wet sand, as she had done so often beside her bed, and tried to conquer the elements by prayer. But no boat dropped down out of the rain-clouds, no human voice cried, "Here I am!"

Yes, there was a human voice. It sounded abruptly in her ear and said, "What are you doing here?"

The voice was Jozup's.

Then she forgot all her secret fear and hatred of him and raised her clasped hands and begged him to take her out on the bay. Alone, it would be hard for her; but together they would find him.

Jozup asked, "How long has he been out?"

And she answered, "Since early morning."

He laughed and said, "Then he has long since returned to shore and is now sitting snugly God knows where."

She would not believe him. He went on: "Do you think a man can stay out there for eight hours in this weather? Or that he would not look for a place to land as soon as he could? No one cares at what point on the shore a storm tosses him. Come in here where it is dry; you are shivering all over." He led her into the shed and slammed the door behind him, so that they were now in half darkness.

The nets were hanging on the wall, and Jurris' coat was spread over the hay in a corner. He often

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hid there when every one was looking for him. She stroked the coat with cold fingers and kissed its hem, murmuring, "Come back! Come back!" But she could weep no more for she had no tears left.

Jozup stood by, biting his lips. Suddenly he said, "Why should he come back at all? There are plenty of others waiting for you."

She turned and spat at him.

"Why do you spit at me?" he said, "since some day I shall be your husband."

She said, "Let me go. I have long known what kind of person you are."

But he crushed her down upon the coat. And holding her hands in an iron grip he expressed himself more freely. "You keep praying that he may come back. If I who am his friend were to pray with you, I should say, 'Let him not come back.' And he won't come back: at least, not alive. And so you belong to me, and I am going to prove it to you this minute."

She fought with him and cried, "Don't touch me! I am carrying his child."

But he laughed at her. "You try to tell me you are carrying his child! Haven't I heard him complain a hundred times about that oath he swore before his father? He was weak enough to keep his word. But I am not that kind, and I would die a thousand deaths to have you."

Still struggling she cried, "I am carrying his child!"

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And in the midst of their struggle he said, "If you are, it isn't his. God only knows whose it is."

At that her arms suddenly lost their strength. She fell backward, and knew no more.

When she sat up again the door was open and she was alone. Jurris' coat was still spread beneath her. Again she stroked it and kissed its hem, but now she thought, "I deserve what has happened to me." She no longer prayed that he might come back. If her lips had formulated a prayer it would have been like Jozup's—"Let him not come back." So filled with shame was her soul, and so lacking in courage.

6

The next spring Marinka gave birth to a boy. He was one day to inherit the Enskys farm, for the other heirs were distant relatives.

Marinka had remained in the house throughout the winter and had been permitted to mourn for Jurris as though they had actually been married by the minister. None of the neighbors thought this strange, for had not plans been made for the wedding? It is true that what transpired was a funeral.

Jurris' mother, who had all but been Marinka's mother-in-law, looked upon Marinka as her son's beloved wife. Even the father was kind to her, but this was because of the grandson he expected. He no longer feared the courts, for he felt himself amply

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protected by the oath which he had extracted from his son—protected even now that the son was dead.

During the entire winter Jozup had been there only to fetch the milk, and Marinka had been careful to avoid him. Once, however, it happened that she did meet him. She had been milking the cows, and was on her way out when she saw him standing squarely in the barn door. The maid followed behind her, carrying the pails. Because of her, Marinka had to act as if nothing unusual was between them. He held out his hand and said, "I shall stay away from you; but when the time comes you will know where you belong."

She went towards him without protest, for she had no doubt that she had fallen to his lot. In truth, she had become so accustomed to the thought that she already looked upon his mother, who came to call from time to time, as her mother-in-law. But the old woman was no longer friendly towards her. Whenever she came limping across the yard on her clattering crutch, Marinka felt her heart sink, and she said to herself, "When I am in the Wolf's Nest I shall wash the dress on my body with tears." For thus ran the old song.

There were times when she thought of going back to her parents after the birth of her child. But she knew how she would be received if she arrived with a child in her arms, and asked for shelter. And in any case it would not mean escape. Jozup would go that far to get her. So she bowed humbly before

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the destiny she foresaw. It was the evil eye of the old woman that chilled her heart.

One day Jurris' mother said to her, "What does that old she-wolf want with you? You should have nothing to do with her." Of course she had no inkling of Jozup's desire.

Shortly thereafter—little Jurris might have been eight weeks old—Jozup arrived in his Sunday clothes at an unusual hour and sat down beside the cradle which stood unwatched before the outer door. Jurris' mother saw in alarm a man whom at first glance she did not recognize, leaning over the sleeping infant.

Jozup raised his head and said, "The dead man was my friend; and I have never seen his child until to-day."

"Look well at him," said the old woman.

He did nothing of the kind, however. He turned to her abruptly and asked, "Have you ever thought of giving him a father?"

"His father is in his grave," she replied; "and he doesn't need another."

"So? Perhaps his mother will have something to say about that," he retorted. "Or do you think you can keep her all her life as your hired girl?"

"The child in the cradle," she said, "will one day be master of this farm, and I look upon her of whom you speak as my daughter. And what is more, it doesn't seem to me that this has anything to do with you."

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"It has this much to do with me," he answered; "that Marinka is soon to be my wife."

The old woman felt suddenly how little power she had over the erstwhile bride of her son. But not for anything would she have allowed Jozup to read her thought. Instead, she said, "Your suit is so welcome to me that I have a great mind to call my husband and have him put you off the farm."

"I haven't been suing for her," he replied. "Her father doesn't live here."

She felt herself defeated and sat down opposite him and wept.

He waited in silence until Marinka had come from the field.

The old woman went to meet her, and said, "Send him away and tell him never to come back."

Marinka hardly dared look at him. "Good morning," she murmured, and she took the child from the cradle. It was crying.

"You have a lovely child," he said; "and I want to be its father."

She bent her head and said softly, "Can't you at least wait until the period of mourning is over?"

Jurris' mother wrung her hands and shouted, "But you are encouraging him!"

Marinka said nothing. She opened her dress and placed the child at her breast.

"Take good care of him for me," he said with a laugh as he went towards the gate.

From then on there were troubled days in that

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house. The mother wept, the old man scolded, and both insisted that she stay with them.

"Here you are treated like a princess, but there in the Wolf's Nest the wolves will eat you hide and hair." Thus ran their refrain.

"Or do you think they will ever forgive you because the child is Jurris'? Now it is clear why the old woman stared at you as though you were carrying a whole brood of bastards." This was their second chorus.

All that Marinka said was, "Have patience until the mourning period has passed." The old man, however, was not idle. He went twice every week to the lawyer, for he was bound he would retain custody of the child. Immediately after the anniversary of Jurris' death, while his grave was still covered with fresh flowers, Jozup appeared again at the farm.

He had arranged this time to speak with Marinka alone. She was coming from the laundry with a basket of clothes and ran right into his arms.

"I did as you asked," he said; "I was patient for a whole year. But now it is ended and I ask you: when will you say yes?"

She looked around, as if hunting a reason to avoid answering him. But no one was in sight.

"Your mother doesn't like me," she said finally. "And you will take her part against me."

"My mother doesn't like you," he answered, "because you are going to bring a strange child into the house. She must not know that it is my child, or she would shout it from here to Berlin."

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"It isn't yours!" she cried. "You know that. And if you don't know it, I swear it to you."

He laughed. "Good old Jurris is dead," he said, "so I don't mind pretending that it is true. But if you think I would take her part against you, you know me very little. I have been mad about you since I gave you the first can of milk from the cart at Augustenhof. I talked with my mother about you day and night, but those cursed Enskys were quicker than me. I wanted to burn their house down over their heads. As for Jurris, I wanted to—well, it doesn't matter now what I wanted to do to Jurris. But didn't you ever wonder why it was I sat next him on the shaft night after night? Did you think I was making eyes at you and nothing else? I didn't say anything to you about my feelings, because I don't like stale beer, and dogs bite a beggar. But you must have known that you could cut me in two with a carving knife and I would not lift a finger to stop you. I take my mother's part against you! Good Lord, child! What sort of person did you think I was?"

As he spoke those words she happened for the first time to look straight into his eyes. Fire seemed to flare suddenly from them, and it seemed to her that she had reached a turning point in her life, and was now to follow unknown paths. Her soul reached out towards him and could no longer resist his will.

"My parents won't agree to it," she said, wanting to say something.

"Which parents? Yours, or Jurris'?"

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"Mine are glad to be rid of me," she answered. "But these here don't want me ever to go away."

"When the hawk swoops down, even the crows fly from their nest. Why should I worry about two hedge-sparrows like them?"

"They are going to make the child their heir. Such luck doesn't come to anybody twice."

"I have a farm to leave to some one, if I want to."

"This is something you can't do anything about, and you know it very well. One's own children always come first."

Jozup was a quick-witted fellow. He saw what he had to do. Unless he threatened, he would not have his way.

"Very well," he said. "Then I shall have to tell my mother what we did on that stormy day when Jurris' boat capsized. And I can't be responsible for what will come of the story."

Marinka saw only disgrace and ignominy before her. Even Jurris' memory would be forever stained. Therefore she was strong in her weakness and said, "An oath means nothing to you"—that it had once meant little to her, she failed to remember—"and so I shall not swear. But what I am about to say is as true as that Jurris will not return. If you want to marry me, I shall not refuse, and I will even keep the child with me until we have one of our own. Then it must return to those who will make it their heir. But if you tell your mother or any one else in the world what you did to me, I will take a boat from the shore on that very day and go out and never come

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back again. Just as Jurris once did. That is all I have to say."

With that she picked up the laundry basket and went past him towards the house.

But he had had his way. What he failed to get to-day, the future would bring, once he had Marinka in his power.

The next morning the old woman came to press the suit. She looked even more angry, even more sullen, than usual. When she kissed Marinka it seemed to the girl that the toothless mouth poured poison over her. However, she was past opposition. Jurris' good mother might caress her; his testy old father might promise her a fourth of his fortune—she remained firm. It was she, too, who determined the fate of the child. Enskys had already taken steps to adopt his grandson as his own child, but the act could not be effective until Marinka had given birth to another child. Until then, little Jurris was to remain with his mother and Jozup would exercise the paternal rights enjoined upon every stepfather.

Thus it was arranged, and there was no longer a dissenting voice.

7

The wedding was celebrated soon after the harvest festival. The Enskys spread themselves even more lavishly than they would have done if Marinka had been their son's wedded wife, so that those who might have thought of casting a stone at her respectability

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felt it fall from their hand. But the old she-wolf grumbled and sneered to herself.

On the morning of the wedding day, long before sunrise, Marinka went to the churchyard to bid farewell to Jurris' grave. She felt that this was the last time she might be allowed to go to it. She prayed that she might have strength for the hard life which lay before her, and that Jurris might forgive her the harm she had done him, through which in the end he had met his death. She was conscious that her destiny was henceforth to be one long penance, but she took it upon herself cheerfully.

Her parents drove up early in the day, and with them her two grown brothers on horseback. All four embraced and kissed her from time to time, yet they seemed to her like distant relations. For years she had scarcely seen them. Her stepmother, whose ill-will had once driven her from home, was somewhat ashamed that the wedding was not to take place at her home. She told everybody that it had not been arranged there because of the great distance and because the parents of Marinka's late betrothed had insisted upon celebrating the marriage in their house. And she gave carefully three more circumstantial reasons.

Marinka's father had brought her dowry with him and held the purse, with its many gold pieces, constantly in his hands. He glanced at every opportunity in the direction of his wife, and it was clear that he was putty in her hands. As soon as she saw

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that Marinka was honored in the house like a daughter, and that there was no danger that she might one day knock at her door for help, she went over and embraced her ostentatiously, saying in a loud voice, "I hope you will remember, my daughter, that you have a home in your parents' house and do not need strangers to shelter you."

Jurris' mother spoke up: "And I hope, my daughter, that you will remember who the real strangers are."

The stepmother was humiliated by this retort, but she said nothing. She had made her point, and desired nothing more.

None of the family asked to see the child, so he was not brought forth.

Later Marinka saw Jozup in the church for the first time. In those days it was still the custom in many places for the bride and bridegroom, each with his company, to go separately to the church, joining together only after the prayer had been read and the minister stood before the altar waiting to pronounce the blessing over them. The bride's guests sat on the right side of the church, and on the left the bridegroom's, looking across in unfriendly fashion at the others. The old woman had stirred them up because Marinka, instead of wearing a bridal wreath, had hidden her blond hair under the dark kerchief worn by married women. She did this because she was not pure, the she-wolf whispered in the ear of her guests. They had of course known for a long

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time that she was not a virgin, and had never given it a thought until she prompted them to think of it as impurity.

Jozup saw and heard nothing of all this. He sat staring at Marinka, with a sort of wild joy in his eyes, as if he were about to cry out, "Have I got you at last?"

Her head seemed bowed in submission, as if she were replying, "Yes, now I am wholly yours."

When the minister asked her to say "yes" she spoke the word as clearly and distinctly as if it were Jurris who stood by her side, and not Jozup.

Jurris' mother sobbed aloud. She too was thinking of him who lay buried in the earth.

An ancient custom of the region decreed that after the loving cup had been drained by all the guests, bride and bridegroom should each go separately to his own home, not to be united for life until the second day of the festivities. But this custom was no longer observed, and they left together for the house in which they were to celebrate their wedding, as is nowadays the usual procedure.

Jozup sat beside his young wife. He neither spoke to her nor looked at her. But when the jolting of the carriage caused his shoulders to brush against hers he shuddered like a man ill, so that she grew frightened and uneasy. And she became still more uneasy when, looking back, she saw the old woman seated in the second carriage, her lips tightly drawn and her gaze piercing the girl through and through.

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"He will devour me with his love," she thought, "and the old woman with her hate."

In the bridal house everything had been perfectly appointed. The doors were wreathed with garlands, and triumphal pillars lined the path as far as the gate. The tables could not hold all the delicious food: there was ox-meat with rice, and plums with dumplings; there was roast pig, and there were lampreys, both spiced and cured. And there were many other things, not to speak of pastries. Those who drank might have brown beer or ale, cherry brandy or corn whiskey,—and there was more than enough of them all.

In the bridal corner, where the most distinguished guests sat nearest the young couple, there were tall decanters containing expensive port which had been specially ordered from Memel.

Despite all this munificence, however, no spirit of happiness or good cheer was manifest. The bridegroom's relatives held themselves aloof from the bride's relatives. Venomous glances flew between them. Any one well disposed towards both factions realized sorrowfully that as soon as the brandy took effect, angry speeches would follow.

The old she-wolf, meanwhile, fired the flames of ill-feeling. Her son deserved a better fate than to rear illegitimate children, she muttered. It could scarcely redound to any one's honor, she went on, to be present at a wedding where the parents of the

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bride, instead of acting as hosts, were in attendance as guests.

The host and hostess endeavored in vain to avert the threatening storm. Good mother Enskys carried plates and glasses as though she were the least of her maids; and however carefully the old man might previously have guarded the treasures in his chest, to-day he opened the lid wide, distributing a quantity of gloves and towels and even silken armbands which had lain hidden away for a hundred years.

Nothing, however, could help. Magila, the goddess of anger, sat by the fireplace and belabored them with rod and whip.

Poor Marinka no longer trusted herself to speak or smile. Jozup sat with clenched fists and eyes that flashed fire to right and left, as if ready to jump straightway at anybody's throat.

The hissing of the old woman continued. Now and then a spiteful word, like the slash of a knife, skimmed the surface of the deepening silence. Had the minister been there, everything would certainly have been different. He had been invited, as was seemly, but he had immediately declined. Every one could imagine why. The only German present was the schoolmaster, but he was still too young to possess an authority sufficient to subdue those around him. And so the foul air thickened.

One of the neighbors, ordinarily a harmless man who had come to the wedding without malice and

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simply to be festive, suddenly raised his glass and called across to the bride's father, "You, there! drink to a good bargain—the wedding."

Naturally this furnished the occasion for malicious laughter. Springing to his feet, old Tamoszus was about to throw his glass at the fellow's head. Others stayed his arm, a great hubbub arose, and the worst seemed on the point of happening.

Then something occurred which no one had expected or considered possible. If the Almighty had come down from heaven to establish peace among them, no one would have marveled more. And indeed it was a kind of god—a *Wieszpatis*—who went to this trouble.

Who did not know the two white Trakehner horses that came suddenly dashing up? Who did not know Mikas on the box, with his marten cap and red silk tassel? Who did not know the polished leather top and the silver-mounted bridle? And who did not know the six-footer with glistening eyes under bushy eyebrows, and the dark pointed beard—who did not know the man who stepped down from the blue cloth cushions and then turned to assist a lady in a silk veil and a cloak of silk? And so he had come to the wedding! He and his wife, whom everybody loved as they had once loved the goddess Milda, who was not only beautiful but who in her goodness stooped even over the humble!

Pride and hatred were impossible in the presence of this miracle. Impurity was no longer implied

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in the wearing of the matron's headdress where the wreath of rue and the silver crown should have been. This man brought peace and happiness and honor to the house.

Those who were seated before the door or in the vestibule rose silently to their feet. Gazing around, Herr Westphal and his wife came into the room whose ceiling was so low that his head would have burst through it if he had drawn himself up to his full height. They walked over to the bridal corner and held out their hands in friendly fashion to Marinka. Flushed and mute, she kept her gaze fixed upon the floor. They greeted Jozup too, congratulating him on having won a wife whose worth they fully appreciated. And then they greeted the host and hostess like old friends, while she, Frau Westphal, exchanged a serious glance with Jurris' mother which only those two understood—and Marinka, who had now dared raise her eyes.

Her stepmother, who was a decent-appearing and still pretty woman, approached them in order to receive their greeting. But the master and mistress paid no more attention to her than if she had been a weed. Nor did they greet the she-wolf, although they might have known that the bridegroom's mother was present.

Sitting down opposite the young couple, Wieszpatis drew from beneath his arm a case which he held out to them. It was lined with silk, and on the bright blue silk lay silver knives and forks and spoons

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which had cost a hundred thalers or more. That was certain. No one had ever known anybody at whose wedding such a magnificent gift had been made.

Wieszpatis said, "This will tell you all how faithfully Marinka once served me and how highly my wife and I still esteem her service."

The lady, however, said to Jozup—in German, since she did not know Lithuanian—"It must be a particular source of happiness to you, Herr Wilkat, to be able to take the place of father to the child of your late friend."

Marinka jumped to her feet in consternation, for up to this moment no one had given the child a thought all day.

The lady went on, "Can he be seen, Marinka?"

Jurris' mother went quickly into the room where the cradle stood, and returned carrying the child on its bright red cushion.

The lady took the child in her arms and cradled it, saying, "A pretty child. It resembles its father, as far as I remember him. Don't you think so, John?"

Wieszpatis was about to agree heartily when he saw that Marinka's eyes were fastened upon him with a look of such fervent anxiety that he was startled and nodded his approval thoughtfully and advisedly. After drinking a glass of wine to the happiness of the young couple, the distinguished guests took an affectionate leave and drove away.

The child and the box of silver continued for a long time to circulate among the guests, passing from

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one lap to another, where alternately they were examined and admired.

Only the old she-wolf, muttering and sneering outside, would have nothing to do with either of them.

8

The property which people called the Wolf's Nest lay a little apart from the village and was assuredly the most considerable of the five farms to which the inhabitants pointed with pride. Very little of it, however, was to be seen, for it was hidden on three sides by a grove of trees so thick that at the most lights could be seen shining through at night. What went on there was concealed from the neighbors. Looking at it from the open country on the fourth side, one saw first the red-tiled roofs which were a symbol of true prosperity and which covered even the barn and sheds, while beyond the trellised gate one was struck instantly by the handsome farm machinery which stood in a row in the compound. To be mistress here would certainly fill with pride anybody given to industry and orderliness.

Marinka grew quickly accustomed to her new life. She had been industrious and resourceful from childhood, and was naturally no less so here on her own farm. Even her mother-in-law, with all her resentment, saw this from her seat at the window of the room set apart for her. It was from this observation post that her eye followed Marinka, ready at every

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moment to reproach her and quarrel with her. She sought eagerly an opportunity to lay violent hands upon her, or to arouse her son's anger against her. She stored up her wrath for a favorable occasion, never appearing at meals and passing in and out of the house without greeting of any kind.

Marinka paid little attention to her hostility, for she had expected worse. What Jozup would do in the event of an open quarrel between them, she did not know. She assumed that although he was deeply in love with her, he would not turn against his mother. For he must certainly be deeply grateful to her for having preferred him to his older brothers in the matter of the inheritance. One brother was a policeman in Berlin, and the other had recently been asking the help of charity. Neither wrote any more.

Jozup himself was another problem. Often, as he sat looking at her for a half hour at a time, for whole hours even, without speaking a word, devouring her as it were with his black whortleberry eyes, she thought shudderingly to herself, "This is too much. It cannot be. It is contrary to God's power and will." And when he lay beside her quivering with a too great love, not daring to approach her, she thought again, "This is my punishment for having sinned against Jurris." In the end he would fall upon her like a wild animal, and then it was she who quivered before his too great love. Often she said

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to herself, "Perhaps he really is a werewolf and does not bear that name for nothing."

But she would dismiss the superstition and console herself with the reflection that he had desired her long and hopelessly, and could not now believe he had his desire. She thought from time to time that she might learn in the end to reciprocate his love. Yet her heart was still in the cemetery where Jurris lay. If she had dared visit the grave now and then, it would have been much easier for her.

Jozup even transferred his savage love to the child. Whether it was his own or not had not again been mentioned, and Marinka deliberately allowed him to think as he chose. She knew that he would otherwise make life very difficult for her. He did not call the child Jurris as he was baptized, but rather *Wilkiutis* or *Wilkytis*, which was no Christian name at all but a term signifying Wolf Cub. He would grow indignant if the servants did not do likewise. Marinka alone was privileged to pronounce his real name. At length she herself was no longer brave enough to do it, and called the child merely baby or darling. The child grew quickly and could walk and talk before the first anniversary of their marriage. Jozup played with him as a wolf plays with its young in the sunshine outside its cave. Lying for a long time on the ground he would allow the child to clamber over him. Then he would toss him into the air and catch him in his open hands as he came down.

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In the twilight two old people often hovered around the alder grove, gazing anxiously at their heir and at Marinka, wondering if her body would not soon show signs of the benediction by means of which the contract would be made effective and their grandson be returned to them. They were forbidden to visit the farm, despite the fact that the old man was the child's legal guardian. Nor was Marinka allowed to go to their home. There were many times when she would have liked to lay her head in the good mother's lap and be caressed by her sympathetic hands. But for the sake of peace she denied herself this happiness too.

In order that they might at least see something of Marinka and the child, the old people, when their week came, had themselves been driving the milk-cart which went the round of the farms. Jozup, however, had the milk-cans set out in advance on the edge of the road, where they stood unguarded until the cart picked them up. And when, upon this or that pretext, Jurris' parents drove silently up to the house, Jozup made short work of it and withdrew from the coöperative society. He did it the more willingly since he himself no longer cared to go to Augustenhof. He did not suggest the reason, and perhaps he knew none. But he spoke of Wieszpatis only as "that German," and he never looked at the beautiful case of silver resting at the bottom of the chest under a dozen layers of clothing.

Jurris had now been dead two years, and the an-

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niversary of his death was approaching. Whether Jozup remembered it or not, at about the hour when the tragedy had happened he suddenly announced that he was going out on the bay with his nets. He did this very rarely, for he was too proud to play the fisherman. When he kissed Marinka good-by there was a glint of triumph in his eyes, and she said to herself, "He is going now to thank God and to rejoice in his violence." And she thought again, "Is poor Jurris to lie there all alone and think I have forgotten him?" Knowing that his parents did not like going to the cemetery, she reproached herself more and more. She took little Jurris casually by the hand, since she had to make it appear that they were merely going for a little stroll. As soon, however, as she was hidden by the alders behind which the old woman could no longer see her, she picked him up in her arms and walked as fast as she could to the cemetery which was a full half hour away.

The grave had grown unkempt. There were no fresh flowers on it and she had not been able to bring any with her. She plucked some maple leaves and succeeded, with the aid of some thread she happened to have in her pocket, in weaving a garland which was to lie handsomely over the whole grave. She had plenty of time, and the child could meanwhile play happily in the sand.

By way of entertaining Jurris' son, and also because she was so contented here at the grave, she sang this song:

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There under the linden
In yonder grave
Lies in slumber
My lad so brave.

On his white grave stone
You may read
Of all his beauty
And his strength in need.

I weave for him flowers
Every spring,
Sit on his grave,
Weave wreaths and sing.

And trim its edges
With slender grasses,
Plant wallflower and amaranth
While time passes.

And I weep and moan
Because death has ravished
Out of my bridal bed
The lad I cherished.

And never my longing
Allows me to sleep;
I come to his grave
And here I weep.

"If I could sit here an hour every evening with my child," she thought, "God knows I would not wish to cry. I should always be happy."

Yet even as she was rejoicing in her security, the

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sound of heavy footsteps was heard from the gate of the cemetery—heavy uncertain footsteps accompanied by a clatter that she knew well. Dropping the garland, she took the child in her arms and went to meet her mother-in-law. The old woman shouted and waved her crutch. "So this is the way you are true to Jozup, you common slut! You can make love even to graves, can you? You came into my house without virginity, and the goddess of the plague put the *muturis*"—the matron's headdress—"on you, not I. You rose up out of the slime, and I shall not rest till I have driven you back into it." And she struck at Marinka with her crutch.

Marinka thought only of protecting Jurris, who had begun to cry when one of the blows had fallen upon him. Without a word of defense she turned and went home.

The old woman limped along behind her and sat down before the gate to wait for Jozup.

When he came in from the bay at about dusk, she told him what had happened. "That's the way she wipes her feet on you," she said. "Now beat her the way she should be beaten."

Drawing his eyebrows even more closely together, Jozup struggled with himself for a time. Finally he said, "Why should I beat her? It is better to give her time to forget him."

"Are you a man or a kitten?" the old woman asked scornfully.

"It is because I am a man," he answered, "that I know what I have to do."

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But she would not leave it at that. "Soft apples rot quickly," she said; "and he who will eat only crumbs is the first to break his teeth. You had better give her what she deserves."

But he was too much in love with Marinka to scold her. He merely held himself aloof from her and did not look at the child for a week. The old woman raged and heckled Jozup on every occasion. For now she had cause. And having once raised her stick against her daughter-in-law without complaint, thereafter, on every pretext, she dared do it again.

At first Marinka let her have her way. Her one thought was to protect the child. But as the attacks became more and more frequent she had to consider her own good. One day, as they stood close to the fireplace, she tore the stick from the cripple's hand and threw it against the kettle hanging there, so that a little of the boiling water spurted out. Instantly the old woman began to howl. Her daughter-in-law had struck her and scalded her; and she showed the servant the blisters on her neck and hands. When Jozup came in from the field she showed them to him also, complaining that for a long time she had feared for her life. Then, for the first time, Jozup laid hands upon his wife. He did not beat her as an angry man has the right to beat his wife. He threw her silently across the table and shook and strangled her as if she had been an ill-behaved dog.

When finally he released her, Marinka took little Jurris in her arms and, though she had been forbid-

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den to do this, ran in her anguish to mother Enskys. The old woman smothered Jurris in kisses, and then called her husband. He fondled the child with equal delight. When Marinka told them what had happened they insisted on the spot that she stay with them. But she would not. "He will come after me to-morrow morning," she said, "and if I resist he may drag me back by the hair. But I know now what I shall say to him, even though there is nothing I can do."

Accordingly she went back. The grandfather wanted to carry the child for her a certain distance, and when she refused he ran behind her in his house slippers, wailing and lamenting and waving his empty arms.

The next morning, as Jozup was about to leave the house without speaking a word, she stopped him and said, "I have had enough of being abused. As Providence has not yet given us a child, there is nothing to keep us together. It is true that I have a wicked stepmother, but at least I shall not be beaten or choked to death at home. So I am going back. You may keep the five hundred thalers."

He went as white as the calcium on the wall, and answered, "The only thing for me to do is tell her whose blood the child is. She may perhaps repeat it, but at least there will be peace in the house."

Marinka said, "Two weeks ago yesterday was the anniversary of Jurris' death. If you do that, to-day

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will be the day of my death, just as surely as I am your wife."

Jozup knew then that in this matter she was adamant, and that he could never make her change her mind. So he said, "I will try to think of another way."

Marinka said, "You can think all you like. But you will find no way except that either your mother or I must leave the house."

Jozup paced the room, crying, "I have been her favorite since I was in baby clothes. She drove my brothers out in order that I might be master here. Don't ask too much of me!"

"I ask nothing," was Marinka's response.

That same morning he went into the old woman's room and stayed there over an hour. Towards noon she came out with a face all honey and said to Marinka, "Set my plate at the table, dear daughter. I shall eat with you hereafter and there will be peace in the house."

Marinka did not trust her. When the old woman called the child her *putytis*—her little rooster—and wanted to take him in her arms, she drew him quickly aside.

From that day forth the she-wolf seemed to have undergone a metamorphosis, and no one could understand how it had come about.

Mother Enskys, however, waiting every Friday evening for Marinka among the alders, said to her, "Keep her away from the hearth. May I be killed

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for a goat if she isn't thinking of poisoning you and the child."

Every evening the old woman sat on the edge of the swamp pond, catching bait, as she explained, for the lines which were soon to be cast. In the evening she would come home laden with herbs which she showed to no one. By the side of the pond, along with the fennel and the sweet-flag, there grew a quantity of hemlock. These pale-tipped hemlock shrubs could have sheltered the whole village. Yes, Marinka watched her carefully.

The fact that the old woman wanted alcohol with which to treat her rheumatism was nothing in itself; but that she should carry the little kettle with her into the kitchen, although she continued to eat at table, gave cause for reflection. And for hours at a time she would sit before the hearth warming her body, although the air was as mild as in summer. From the time the water was first put on until the meal was finished, Marinka did not stir from her place. Scarcely daring to turn her head away, she grew at length quite giddy from the incessant anxiety.

One evening when there was gourd porridge with sugar and raisins, she was struck by a strange odor which arose from the vessel. Jozup, like many others, did not like gourd, and so was served something else. The old woman was suddenly seized with an attack of the colic. She went to bed and had the servant brew her a cup of melissa tea, so that only Marinka and the child were left to eat the porridge.

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The servants had had their supper earlier. Marinka merely pretended to eat, and gave nothing to the child. She put as much of the porridge as she could into a wide-necked bottle, and ran off surreptitiously with it to mother Enskys, who would be able to do about it what was necessary.

The next Friday evening mother Enskys said, "I took it to old Settegast in Heydekrug, and he tested the brew. He said that the State prosecutor would be satisfied if any one showed him half that amount. And everything is here on this slip of paper."

Marinka took the paper and went to Jozup. "Your mother is too much for me," she said.

"How so?" he asked, untying his cravat, for he was undressing.

"Because she has tried to do away with me—me and the child."

He flushed at her words as though he were suffocating, and tore his shirt open at the throat.

"I have promised not to beat you," he said, "but you make it very hard for me."

"Here is the proof," she said.

When he saw the name of Settegast, whom every one respected, he grew as pale as he had been red before, and he sat in silence while she told her story. She did not even hide from him that it was mother Enskys who had taken the porridge to the chemist. "Beat me if you wish," she said, "but I must protect the child regardless of who his father is. The best

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thing is for you to let me go. Otherwise I shall never stay alive."

"You and the child will remain here," he answered.

"Very well," she said. "Then your mother must go or I shall bring an accusation against her."

"You will accuse her in court?" he asked, as if he had not heard correctly.

"As surely as I have a child, I will accuse her in court."

Then, half clothed as he was, he ran out and did not come back that night. Nor was he to be seen anywhere the next morning. It was not until noon that he came suddenly out of the she-wolf's room. His whole body was trembling and he said, "I have spoken to my mother. I have told her what she must do from now on. I have made arrangements with my brothers. They are to have half the income from the property and to provide for mother as long as she lives. Do you understand now how much I love you—you and the child?"

Three days later the old woman drove off. She had scarcely dared utter a denial, for she knew an indictment threatened her.

Sitting on the wagon with Jozup who was driving her to the station, she waved her crutch for the last time at Marinka and shouted at her the curse of curses: "May *Perkuhns* meet you after St. Bartholomew's!" Since, however, Bartholomew's Day was

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still far off, she corrected herself: "No—may *Perkuhns* meet you now, at once!"

The horses started and she drove away to a distant place where the Lithuanian god of thunder is unknown.

9

There followed four years of married life which might be called years of happiness. The image of Jurris faded bit by bit out of Marinka's heart. Since there was no one now to spy upon her, she might have gone as often as she liked to his grave; but she felt no inclination to do so.

The child grew into a sturdy little fellow, ever ready to struggle for his rights and to shout his demands from morning until night. Jozup never tired of encouraging him in this. Even when the child misbehaved he would say, "That's the trick, my lad. Pitch and tar are cousins." He taught him to drive the pigs and to lead the cows to pasture. He set him on the back of whatever animal happened to be nearest home. At the age of four the boy was riding the ill-tempered grey mare, which was far from the tamest of horses. Their intimacy grew from month to month. By the fifth spring, when it was about time he was sent to school, Jozup was taking him out mornings to the field with him. He let him hold the handle of the plow, gave him a corner of the seed-bag to carry, and said to him, "This is the first thing

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that a farmer's son must learn. If he doesn't learn this, no reading and no arithmetic will do him any good." It was an inexpressible and never expressed bit of good fortune that there was as yet no indication that little Jurris might have a brother or sister. Heaven itself seemed to take care that peace and calm remain in the ascendant in this atmosphere of uneasy well-being.

At the Enskys' home, however, two old people fell nightly upon their knees and prayed to God that He save them from going lonely to their graves, and that He give them back their grandson and heir. And at last their prayer was answered. However carefully Marinka might strive to conceal it, the servants carried the news abroad, and soon the whole village knew that she was with child. Jozup went about like a madman, crying that whoever tried to take his son from him would be shot. The Enskys merely laughed when his words were reported to them. Hadn't they it down in black and white?

One day they were bold enough to appear at the gate of the Wilkat farm. Marinka, who was in her eighth month and could undertake no heavy tasks, remained at her work among the sweet peas and pretended not to see them when they went past the picket fence. They had seen her, though, and were about to go straight into the garden when they met Jozup who was coming out of the house.

"Are you anxious to have me unleash the dog?" he greeted them.

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Their passion for the child was stronger than their fear. The old man, who had been creeping along a little behind his wife, said shrewdly, "If I were in your place I would try to come to an understanding with us. You can't do anything with the authorities."

To Jozup this seemed a hint that they might be ready to compromise in a manner suitable to him. He asked them in. He soon learned, however, that they were standing their ground and that what they wanted was to know exactly when the child would be turned over to them.

Jozup's one idea was to keep his son, who was the light of his life. For one moment he thought of revealing to them the secret which bound him to the child, but immediately he cast the thought from him. He had learned at least this about Marinka, that however gentle she might otherwise be, on this subject she was firm—and that nothing in the world could cause her to change. Jozup had no desire to dredge her body from the bay. In his frantic witlessness he cast about at random for a single justification of his possession of his own flesh and blood. He could think of none, however, except the one with which he scandalized his wife.

"You named the child Jurris," he said; "but how do you know that the child is really Jurris'?"

Mother Enskys raised her clasped hands as though to entreat him not to deal the blow which would rob them of all hope. But the old man cried again and

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again as he danced in rage about Jozup, "Who is it? Who is it?"

And he answered, more at random than because he felt any deep-seated suspicion, "Well, it might have been, for instance,—Wieszpatis. Everybody knows that he has children scattered everywhere; and she was at his farm for three years."

The mother sank down upon a chair as if struck by lightning. But the old man ran precipitately into the garden where he had seen Marinka at work.

She was startled and stood up from the ground, thinking that Jozup in his violence might have threatened the old man. But he cried, "Ah, the truth is out, you harlot! You were Wieszpatis' mistress, and the child is his. Confess that the child is his!"

Stunned and surprised, it seemed to her that everything for which she herself was scarcely responsible had by some unfortunate circumstance become common knowledge. She bowed her head and answered, "If you know, why do you ask?"

The old man turned hastily back through the garden and across the compound, shouting, "She has confessed that Wieszpatis is the father. She has confessed."

Jozup came out of the house as pale as ashes. He took the old man by the collar and dragged him to the gate. There he kicked him in the direction of his weeping wife and went back to Marinka, who was dragging her heavy body wearily out of the garden.

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"He looks like a hangman," she said to herself. But she knew that nothing in the world could deliver her out of his power, and surrendered herself to it.

"Go into the house," he ordered, following close behind.

He drove out the maids who were standing about the hearthstone in alarm, and pursued her into the room. Her legs had grown so weak that she had to sit down. His eyes burned through her like green lights at night.

"What happened with Wieszpatis?" he asked, not without tenderness.

"How could it be helped?" she replied. "He was the master and I was the maid. And when I went one Saturday to balance the books, he told me that I pleased him."

"And that went on three whole years?"

"It went on while I had charge of the dairy."

"And when you saw that you had a child by him you tried to make Jurris the father?" he asked, yet more affectionately.

She shook her head. "No, it was not like that." And then she told him the truth: how Wieszpatis had had her come to Augustenhof once more—Jozup himself had been the intermediary—and how she had had to go alone because Jurris was nowhere to be found. The master had said, "We must celebrate our parting, Marinka." She had pleaded, saying, "Let me go, master." But he was the master, and she had so often done his will that she thought she could

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not refuse him this time. From that incident all the misfortune had come.

He said, "I have promised not to beat you; and that is your luck, for otherwise you would not leave this room alive. Now you must bear me a son, for you owe it to me. What I shall do then I do not know. I advise you, however, to keep the brat that you saddled upon me out of my sight. A master's son is a whore's son. If he gets into my way I'll throw the first thing to hand at him. Even though it be the grindstone."

She raised her hands imploringly and wept and asked, "What am I to do with him, in my condition?"

"That is your affair," he answered, and strode through the door.

Marinka ran as fast as she could to protect the child who sat on the grass near the horses. Fortunately, she found him and waited until the way was clear. Then she drew him quickly into the outhouse.

"Make up a bed for me and the child," she ordered the housemaid. "I am going to sleep here until my hour comes."

The child cried for his father. He wanted to go out and play with him as he was used to do. She covered his mouth with her hand for fear that Jozup might burst into their retreat and do as he had threatened.

For full two weeks she stayed there with little Jurris, not daring to go out. The maids took good

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care of her, for she had always been a kind mistress to them. Jozup, however, gave her no peace. When he passed the outhouse he would shake his fist in the direction of the window and shout degrading words which usually are heard only in places of ill-fame. He called his wife a *klorka*. And he called her *szunyoda* and *payudela*. These are words which are better left untranslated. He continued to threaten her. However tightly she might shut the window, she heard and understood everything he said. "Don't think you are going to get off easily, my dove, because I have promised never to beat you. I'll have some one come who will do it for me. Your back will be salved with the frying-pan and your legs caressed with a switch, so that every day will be Easter Sunday to you the whole year round."

Marinka lay trembling all night long, thinking, "Who can it be that he means?" But she could think of nobody who might enjoy torturing her. What she most feared was that Jozup would kill the boy. And as her time grew shorter her anxiety increased lest, when she could no longer watch over him, he might fall a victim to his father's anger.

10

One afternoon—it was late in August and people were working out of doors harvesting the second crop of hay—Marinka, watching from the outhouse window, saw Jozup hitch up the buggy, order a

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basket of food and drink loaded in, and drive away. Hesitating no longer she dressed the child in his Sunday clothes and got herself into clothing as best she could in her condition. With Jozup away she had courage to go out of doors. Only the housemaid was left at home. Marinka did not ask where Jozup had gone, but said merely, "I want to get the child away now. Say nothing to the master about it, even if I am not back by night." The end of her sentence was an afterthought by way of precaution, for although she was setting out, she did not know where she was going. The maid looked after her sympathetically, shaking her head.

She found it difficult to have to meet people on the way, for every one had long known what had happened. They nodded to her, however, in friendly fashion, even though they did not speak to her. As she was about to pass the Enskys farm where she had spent so many happy days, her grief so overcame her that she sat down on the edge of the ditch and cried. A voice within her said, "Go in! Mother Enskys may not send you away. She may be able to advise you."

It happened, fortunately, that the old man was out in the fields, and the good mother was under no restraint. Raising the child at once to her lap she said, "Here he is, the boy for whom we have prayed for years; and he is as pretty as a picture. He ought to belong only to us now."

She kissed him, and went on, "Had Jurris lived he

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would never have found out and would have loved him as his own. God knows I should have done the same! And I love him even now, if only because he was bequeathed to us by Jurris. But Enskys will not. He is through with him."

Marinka stroked her sleeve, pleading, "Tell me, mother, what shall I do?"

Mrs. Enskys answered, "There is a father. He ought to look after you."

Marinka was terrified to the bottom of her heart. It had never occurred to her that she and her affairs might become Wieszpatis' concern.

Mother Enskys continued, "If he learns that his flesh and blood is utterly neglected and without a home, he will take it in. For it is not for nothing that everybody says he is a good and just man."

Marinka shuddered and a great exhaustion overcame her. She almost fell from the bench to the floor. Mother Enskys held her up, and said, "It is easy to understand how hard it is for you. Luckily, this is our week, so you can go at once with the milk-cart, for the hired man is driving in to town."

"But we should stop at all the farms to collect the cans. I couldn't bring myself to do it," Marinka said.

That would not be necessary, said the old woman. The lad could make the rounds first and then come back for her. And so it was done.

It was already dark when she reached Augustenhof with the child. The Swiss in the dairy looked at

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her distrustfully, but she paid no attention to him. She took little Jurris by the hand and started towards the master's house. When she came to the brook which ran from the pond into the garden, her heart beat so violently that she thought she would topple over the railing of the bridge. Hearing laughter from the porch and seeing the candlelight under cream-colored glass globes, her strength failed her utterly.

"Who is there?" she heard the voice of the master call.

And since she was unable to make any response, he continued, "Agnes, go see who it is."

A young girl—probably this was Agnes—came down the steps and asked, "What do you wish?" And as Marinka still did not answer, the girl called up, "A woman with a child is here, but she won't speak."

Then he, the master, came down the steps. She bowed her head and kissed his sleeve.

"I can't see very well," he said. "Is it Marinka?"

With that her power of speech returned, and she said, "Yes, it is me."

"Come in," he ordered, and preceded her and the child up the steps, past some guests, both young and old, of whom there were at least six or seven. Recognizing Frau Westphal, Marinka kissed her hand hastily, then passed through the summer living room, the large hall, and the smaller corridor, still behind him. The child was good and did not cry at all.

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Thus they reached the workroom, which was at the gabled end of the house and had three padded doors, one to the right, one to the left, and a third leading to the corridor through which they now passed.

He turned on the electric light. She did not know of that, for in her day they had used oil lamps. The writing table, at which she had always arranged her accounts on Saturday, was still there. And the couch in the left window corner was also there. Everything, in fact, was just as though she had never been away.

He stood under the overhead light and stared at her for a long time. He said nothing of the child she was expecting nor of the one she held by the hand. He began to speak in this fashion: "I was very sorry, Marinka, when your husband took his milk away from me a few years ago. For that reason we have been out of touch with one another, and I know nothing about you any more. During this whole time you have not once come near me, and that is something which usually does not happen to me. I shan't say that I esteem you highly for it, for whenever I can help I am only too glad to help. But sit down, for you are tired, and tell me what brings you here?"

She kept thinking to herself, "He doesn't even look at his child."

Now, however, as she sat down on the extreme edge of the divan and took the child between her knees, he looked at him.

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"Ah, what a sturdy little fellow he has grown to be," he said, and he held out his hand caressingly from his chair at the desk, as if to stroke a puppy.

But the child was unresponsive and drew closer to his mother.

"How shall I ever tell him?" she thought. "The best thing would be to go away as I came."

"Now then, Marinka, tell me all about it."

"I haven't anything to tell, master."

"Now, now. A woman in your condition doesn't travel as far as this for no reason at all. So tell me. Does your husband want a mortgage, or does he want to build, or what is it? I'll give him whatever he wants because I trust you both."

"My husband doesn't need a mortgage," she said, "and he doesn't want to build. But it has come out about you and me, master."

Turning abruptly in his swivel chair so that it squeaked, he bent forward in order to look more closely into her face with his deep eyes. The light fell directly upon him from above.

"He has grown quite grey," she thought. And he looked now like God. But an austere and angry God.

"Only you and I knew it," he insisted. "And no one has learned it from me."

She ought now to have said, "Nor from me either," but her fear of him was so great that she dared not speak.

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"I'd better go," she said, and tried to get up. But she was so weak that she fell back again.

Suddenly he realized that he had been harsh with her. From the cut-glass decanter which stood in its old place on the table, he poured her a glass of wine. And the box of chocolates into which she had often been allowed to dip he held out to the child. At first the child refused to take anything, but he finally accepted what was poured into his hollowed hands.

"Now let's talk reasonably," the master said, "and tell me everything." But she could not. She sat there gazing vacantly before her.

"Marinka," said the master, "you were once the joy of my leisure hours and I have never shown my gratitude for it. You have a big place in my heart. Remember that and take courage."

His words were so reassuring that she said forthwith, "The child—he is your child, master."

"Oh, the devil!" said the master, and he laughed aloud. "That is surely news to me." Then taking the child by the hand he led him into the light and regarded him from head to foot. "As I said, he is sturdy. When he grows up he will probably look like me. You know, they all do look like me."

Yes, she knew that well enough. At times there were five or six of them working on the farm. Stood in a row, they looked like brothers and sisters.

He went on, "The thing is quite possible. But I think this is Jurris' child. Besides, if I have been well informed, he bears Jurris' name."

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"That is true," she answered, "but he is not his. And he is not my present husband's either."

"Was he one of us, too?" asked the master, and she could only say yes.

"You—were well provided for," the master cried, and could not stop laughing. The laughter made her very sad.

Up to this point they had spoken German. Marinka saw that she would never get anywhere in a foreign language if her object was to tell him everything. And she had to tell him everything, for only he could understand her, and it had long weighed heavily on her heart. Therefore she began in Lithuanian to relate what had happened. He listened attentively and grew more and more grave. In the midst of her story he reached towards the child and lifted him to his knee. The boy was no longer afraid of him and ate his chocolate in silence.

When she had finished he ran his hand over the child's head and set him gently on the ground. She knew the master's habit. He had to get his legs free for movement, for he was restless when his heart was full of anything.

He paced the room awhile and then rang the bell. "Tell them not to wait for me," he said to the maid who came in. "I am busy." Once she had been this very maid, and often he had said the same thing to her. He continued to pace the room. Finally he stopped before her and asked, "How will you get home?"

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"The Enskys' milk-cart is waiting for me," she answered.

The great moment had arrived. The fate of the child had to be decided.

"Mother Enskys thought," she stammered, "since he is your flesh and blood and I do not know what to do with him, that perhaps, master, you would take care of him and let him grow up on your estate. You have so many hands on your farm."

Originally she had intended to make greater demands upon him. Now that she had again seen the manor house she felt that even this little was difficult of fulfillment.

"You forget, Marinka," he said, "that my wife, to whom I am accountable, is there outside. The rumor would very soon reach her ears and there would be no end of trouble. It was already a good deal for me to have agreed, when she insisted that I go with her to your wedding. I didn't want to refuse her for your sake, my child, for no suspicion attached to you at all. If it should come out now, it would be a fault for which I could never atone."

Marinka did not quite grasp his meaning, but she did realize that her request had been presumptuous.

"Then I had better go along," she said for the second time. This time she did not collapse, but he grasped her shoulder and held her so fast that she could not struggle to her feet.

"In the twenty-six years that I have been here," he said, "no stranger has ever gone out of this room

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without consolation; and am I to send you, whom I once loved dearly, out into the night without help? That is impossible, Marinka, even though I have unfortunately nothing to offer you but money."

"I don't want any money!" she exclaimed.

"Do not despise money," he cautioned her; "for it makes the wicked good and the callous gentle. I have always given every one who had a child by me, or who at least said it was mine, a thousand thalers to take away with her. And none of them has ever complained. I shall endow this child three times as well, so that the world may know he is well taken care of,—and you will see that this very evening he will find a home."

Thereupon he sat down at the desk and wrote out an order for the payment of ten thousand marks. He added instructions as to how the interest was to be collected and how the capital was to be paid. He stamped it with the seal of the office of which he himself was head, and handed it to Marinka.

Meanwhile she was thinking, "Let happen to me what may. The child is provided for."

II

When Marinka drove up to the Enskys farm with her child, the mother was sitting in the moonlight waiting for her as on that evening six years before whence all her unhappiness had come.

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"Father has long been in bed," she said; "so come in and eat."

Exactly as she had done on that other night, Marinka sat down beside the hearth and ate without knowing what she was eating. The child was asleep.

When mother Enskys asked what had happened, Marinka produced the order for the money and handed it to her. The old woman seemed at first unable to believe her eyes. "Ten thousand marks! Ten thousand marks!" she repeated again and again incredulously. "But then everything is all right," she said, "and I must go waken father."

Marinka was afraid that the old man would put her and the child out at once. But mother Enskys merely laughed, took the paper, and went into the bedroom with it. After quite a while she came back. Behind her, his bare feet in slippers, and wearing only his night clothes, came the old man bobbing up and down like a weasel. He wished Marinka good evening, took the sleeping child on his bare knee, and said that he himself would put the boy to bed. Children ought to go to bed with the chickens, he believed.

Marinka could not imagine what had happened. "In what kind of bed?" she asked.

"Why, the one that has been waiting for him for years." And, the old man went on, for his part he had always said this business of Wieszpatis was only gossip. Jozup himself had thought it up in order to deceive the Enskys. The proof of it was that Herr

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Westphal never gave as much as this to his own children, or he would long ago have been a beggar.

When Marinka, in her amazement, was about to interrupt him, his wife stopped her, saying, "Leave him alone. He will convince himself and others too—and it's all for the best."

Marinka remembered the words Westphal had spoken just before writing the order of payment. She thanked the Lord that the child had truly found a home that very evening.

She made no attempt to undress him herself. She was aware that she had done this for the last time. She prayed over him, sealed his lips with the sign of the cross and went to the outer door, where they stood waiting for her.

"Oh, if they would only ask me to stay with them!" thought Marinka. But they did not. How could they?

"I will keep the document," said the old man, "for I am his guardian."

Mother Enskys went with her a bit of the way in the darkness, and said as they took leave of one another, "I am only fifty-four and in good health. I have certainly twenty years yet. For that length of time, at least, all will be well with him. You know that."

Yes, Marinka knew that. And she thanked her with her tears.

"What is to become of you?" asked mother Enskys.

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"Pray that I may die in childbirth," said Marinka, and she went on.

The moon was high in the heavens. It was the harvest moon, but the air was as warm as in July. As she approached the Wolf's Nest fear overcame her. The watchdog would bark until he recognized her. Jozup, who slept very lightly, would cry out, "Who is there?" And if she said, "It's me, Marinka," his insults would pour forth—*klorka* and *szunyoda* and *payudela,* and all the others with which he was accustomed to regale her.

She paused and took a deep breath. No one was waiting for her. She might do with the night hours as she chose. But where should she pass them? She had no home except this. Then she remembered the cemetery which for so long a time she had not visited. It came over her suddenly that to sit on Jurris' grave until morning was what she needed. No one would see her there; no one would hear her; there would be no one to cry out at her or revile her. Accordingly, she took the way to the churchyard which she had almost forgotten.

Jurris' grave was not easy to find, for many a pilgrim had settled here in the meantime, and the weeds had grown higher. In the end, however, she did distinguish it and sat down on the mound whose sandy earth was made sparsely green by the myrtle which grew there. His parents had set up a new wooden slab, which was already worn, for the inscription upon it was indistinct, as if washed by the

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rains, so far as one could make out in the moonlight.

"Soon they will all have forgotten him," she thought. And it seemed to her that she had been doubly and trebly unfaithful to him. She might have gone often to his grave; there had been time, and no one would have asked questions. Yet here she was, finding time only to-day to do it, the way people always seek out an old abandoned friend only when they do not know where else in the world to go.

"Oh, if I could only cry a little!" she thought. But she had already cried too much this day. After all she was not so downhearted. She was merely tired now. Leaning her weary back against the slab she thought, "I should like to go to sleep here." And she did, for a while. But soon the night wind awoke her. Lying now with closed eyes she had no desire to get up again.

A great calm lay all around. Only the brittle leaves of the trees rustled together and the grass stirred where an insect moved through it. She thought of all the spirits that came to life at night in just such a churchyard. Yet she was not in the least afraid, for Jurris would be among them, and he had often protected her in the past.

She fell asleep once more with this thought, and it seemed to her in her dream that he stood by her side and caressed her cheek. She awoke and found it was only the wind. She was sorry she had not remained asleep.

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"Now I really must go home," she thought. But the oppressive fear, which once already had driven her back as she approached the Wolf's Nest, came over her again.

"What will become of me there?" she thought. "As soon as he sees me he will torment me and the servants will not know whether I am still their mistress or not. I belong here. To my Jurris. Here in the cemetery."

She turned sidewise to kiss his grave, and only got sand between her teeth. Despondently she thought of the days to come.

"He will soon take the child away from me," she thought. "I am no longer a proper mother for it. I am now only the *gimdywa*—the woman in labor. I have to give him a child to replace the one he cast out; after that I may leave. He will see to it that I am brought to the cemetery."

It seemed to her that she would rather stay here. She thought of the humiliation he had inflicted upon her since the day of the storm when Jurris was drowned, and of the shame he would still heap upon her, he and the accomplice with whom he had threatened her.

She said to herself, "In vain have I sworn that I would drown myself in the bay if he revealed my shame to the Enskys. For what he now cries from the housetops is as bad as what his mother might at one time have told."

The image of the she-wolf rose vividly before her,

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and there suddenly came over her a terror so frightful that she jumped up from the grave and ran hither and thither like one bereft of her senses. Suppose the accomplice, the tormentor for whom he was to send, was none other than the she-wolf herself? What then? Whither then?

She ran to right and to left as if she would escape her and knew not how. It was certainly too late to set the law against her, nor had she any longer the desire. Moreover, Jozup would never have brought his mother back if this danger still threatened her.

Then a voice seemed to say, "But he has not brought her back."

Of course it was Jurris' voice. Either he was hovering near, or she had awakened him with her wailing, and he was speaking to her from his coffin. Throwing herself upon her knees beside the grave, she buried her head in the sand in order to be closer to him, and pleaded fervently, "Oh, help me, dearest Jurris, help me!"

The voice continued, "In truth, he merely wanted to frighten you as one frightens young children with the name of *Baboczius*. And he is after all not so bad. He loved you for more than five years, and you were so happy with him that you forgot me entirely. Don't think I blame you for it. No, I do not blame you in the least. While I knew that you were happy there above, I was at rest here below. It was only when you came here and cried that I was filled with sorrow. Now go home in peace and re-

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sign yourself patiently to the period of trial that God our Master has set for you. Jozup will not send for the she-wolf nor will he send for any other accomplice. And when he sees how faithfully you serve him, he will grow kind again, and all will be as it so recently was."

Thus spoke Jurris from his grave while she listened intently.

Filled with confidence, she arose and prepared to go home. This time no sense of horror overwhelmed her. On the contrary, she was cheerful at the thought of surrendering her body to new pain. If only that one thing did not happen, if only her mother-in-law, the she-wolf, did not come, then everything would be well. From Jozup himself she would gladly endure whatever mortification he chose to inflict upon her.

She smoothed into place the sand which her reclining body had scattered, drew the creepers carefully over the spot, and in gratitude repeated a *Paternoster*. Then she made her way homeward.

A yellow streak was already visible above the dark forest to the east. The wind blew more sharply and the birds were already twittering. When she reached the gate of the farm it was almost dawn, and the dog did not bark. Since he recognized her from afar, he merely rapped with his tail against the wall of the kennel.

As she was about to pass the house she saw that in the small room a light still shone. Stepping quickly

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back, she stood close to the garden fence in the corner at the gabled end of the house. She stood there waiting and listening, and she heard two voices within. One belonged to Jozup, but the other—for four years she had not heard it, and she had believed she never in her life would again have to hear it.

So she had come back, the she-wolf! It was for her that he had harnessed the buggy, in order to bring her from the station, and the maid had said nothing out of sympathy. Whither now? The Enskys did not want her; her parents did not want her; even Jurris in his grave did not want her. By cunning and deceit he had sent her home. She turned about and ran and ran, without thought or heed, as fast as her legs would carry her. To get away! Away from the house! Away from life! Away, away, away!

All at once she saw before her the grey-blue water and the swaying boats, and nearby, Jurris' shed.

The sun had not yet risen when she moved out into the bay. . . .

12

A little later on that same day a mourning party sailed in three boats from the general direction of Karkeln, northwest towards the isthmus. It was made up of men and women from the cathedral town of Nidden. They constituted the funeral procession of a woman of Nidden, who had married in

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Karkeln and paid for it on giving birth to her first child.

The young widower, in honor of his late wife, had arranged a fine funeral. There had been dancing and drinking throughout the night, and all were now in a mood of great bliss.

In the first boat sat the dead woman's parents. It is true that they themselves were very quiet. Yet they were glad that the others were so merry, for they could now be certain that their child would be long and pleasantly remembered. Their attention was centered upon a longish bundle which the old woman was cradling solicitously in her arms while her husband was careful to hold off from it the lower edge of a flapping sail.

In this bundle lay muffled their child's heritage—the baby whom they had taken to bring up for their son-in-law. Where he lived, there was no mother's milk about, and there was even some question whether it could be got by them any more easily in Nidden. In the meantime, the child was eagerly nursing the bottle in which bread crumbs had been stirred with sugar. When he began to cry, he was offered fennel water, of which there was not much. Since he was still too young for cow's milk, the danger was not remote that he might soon return to that eternity from which he had just arrived.

The others, however, paid little attention to such old wives' cares. They laughed and sang, and when the merriment died down they passed around the

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bottle again, in order to revive their spirits. Of a sudden one of them noticed that from the northeast an empty boat was approaching, borne by the wind. To meet an empty boat is a sign of good luck. Accordingly the helmsman of the foremost boat was about to make a half turn in order to capture his prize. Those who were behind, however, called to him not to bother, saying that in a half hour the boat would be washed up on the shore of the isthmus and would then be easier to capture than now. And so the procession continued on its course. But just as they came exactly to the windward of the drifting boat they heard something which sounded like the wail of an infant.

Those behind thought of course that it came from the bundle held by the old woman. But the others knew at once that it was a different sort of wail.

The helmsman of the leading boat determined to see for himself. He veered sharply towards the empty boat. But it was not empty. One after the other, they saw to their astonishment that an unconscious woman lay stretched on the bottom of the boat with a new-born babe at her feet.

The women pressed the men back, in order that their gaze might not be profaned by the shame of birth. The two most skilled stepped gently into the boat to render aid to the unconscious woman. In the boat where the little bundle lay beneath the edge of the sail, an old man said softly to his wife, "Let us give thanks to the Lord, for it seems to me he has sent us nourishment for the child from heaven."

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The grandmother said, "Don't rejoice too soon. That is no maid's child there. She looks like a well-to-do farmer's wife and she'll be leaving us soon."

Nevertheless, they volunteered to take the unknown mother into their care. The others were relieved at the thought that they had no further responsibility.

Thus it happened that Marinka, who had gone out to seek eternal rest beneath the waters, awoke in another soft warm feather bed; and instead of one child to whom she had given life, discovered two in the cradle beside her. But when the old people inquired curiously whence she had come and who she was, she cried and refused to speak. Nevertheless, a declaration of her presence in the community would have to be made at the town clerk's office. When, on the second day and then the third she still did nothing but weep and refuse to speak, her hosts did not know what to do.

It happened that the pastor of souls in Nidden was Herr Hofheinz, a younger brother of the Lutheran superintendent whom even to this day the people of Tilsit recall with esteem. Like his brother, he was a godly and an energetic man, who loved the Lithuanians as though he were one of them and who, to the best of his powers, afforded both counsel and protection to all those in need. They took their difficulty to him.

"She has apparently suffered some great sorrow," he said. "Let her be for a week or so. In the meantime, I'll look after the authorities. Once she has

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recovered her strength, I myself will question her."

This was obviously the right way. On the ninth day he came into her bedroom, shut the door, and remained with her for two hours. His eyes were filled with tears when he came out, and he said, "God performed a miracle for this woman."

"For us too," the grandfather said. "If it weren't for her, Anikka's child would be dead."

It was less than two days later that Jozup learned where his wife was, and with her the child he thought she owed him. And because he was ashamed to have driven her to her death, he declared briskly that he was prepared to take her back.

But it was precisely the thought of this that made Marinka shudder. Fortunately, the minister was there to guard her. He had given orders that if a man came to inquire in the village where the Kiekutis family—with whom the strange woman was staying—lived, no one should know. Not even the town clerk. And if the man persisted, he was to be directed to the parsonage; there he would get the information he wanted.

Thus it came about that Jozup ran from one door to another, and finally discovered in a rage that he was being made sport of. At last he found himself face to face with a man who was not so easily browbeaten as a helpless woman.

He confessed that he was perfectly indifferent to Marinka's fate. For all he cared she might go to the

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devil. But the child—he must have the child, dead or alive.

Now Hofheinz, the minister, was a good friend of old Settegast, whose daughter, as a matter of fact, later became his second wife. He spoke of this friendship to Jozup, adding that if the story of the broth got out it would not be Marinka who would be put in the dock.

Jozup softened instantly, abandoned all his claims, agreed to a divorce, and agreed even to allow Marinka alimony in an amount corresponding to the position of a landowner's wife.

He went back across the bay, back to his mother the she-wolf, without so much as seeing Marinka; and ever afterward he was a changed man.

Marinka remained with the good people, who were almost as much attached to her as mother Enskys had once been. She nursed the strange child along with her own, and both grew rosy and bright. One year later, when the child's father sailed across to see him, he found his son no different than he would have been had the mother lived.

It came about almost as a matter of course that he and Marinka determined to marry. He was a great deal like Jurris, and this pleased Marinka most of all.

The wedding was celebrated peacefully and quietly. And they are still living peacefully and quietly together.

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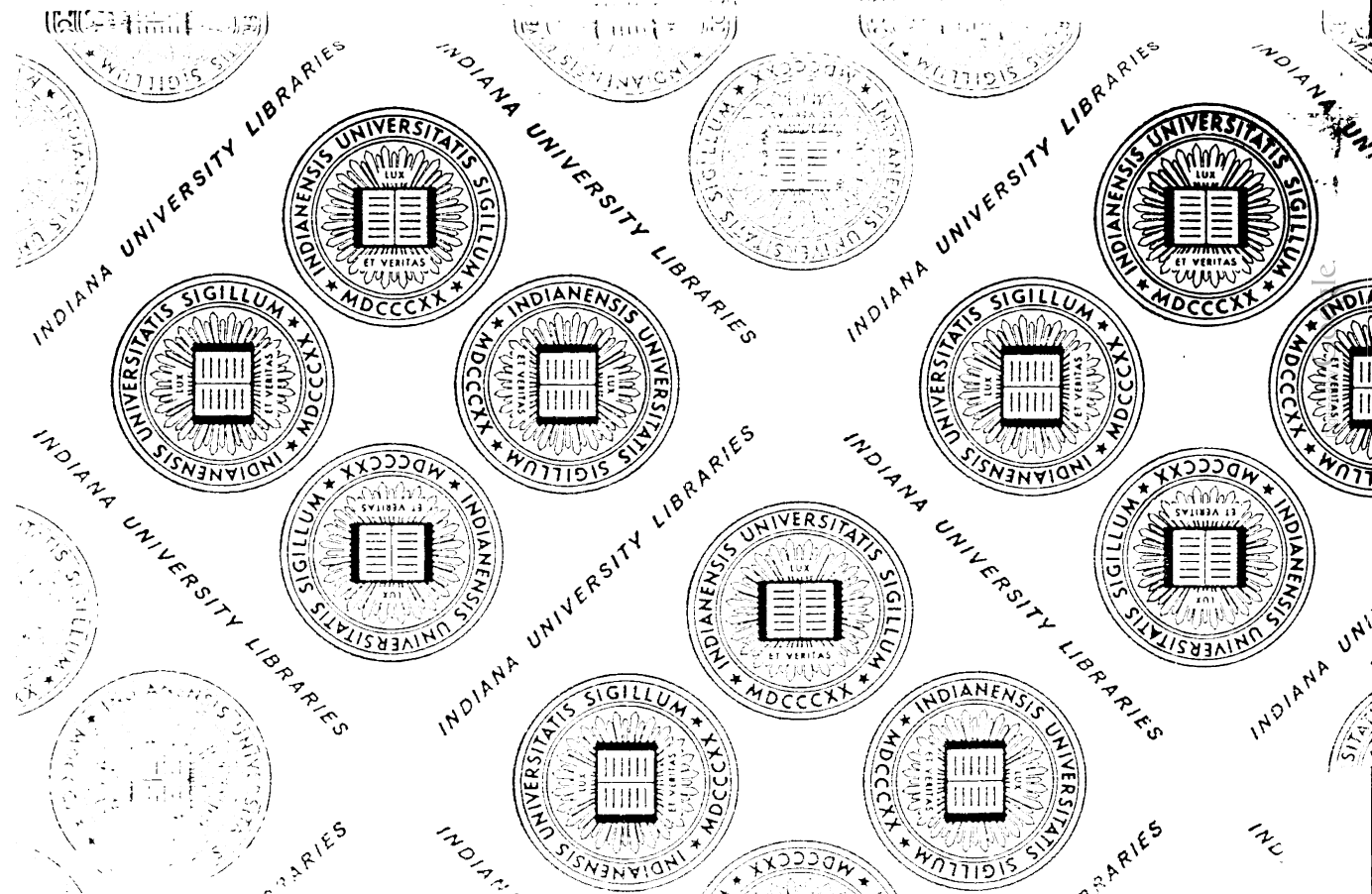
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